俺の妹がこんなに可愛いわけがない

6

伏見つかさ
Tsukasa Fushimi
Illustration◆かんざきひろ

ore no imouto ga konnani kawaii wake ga nai 6

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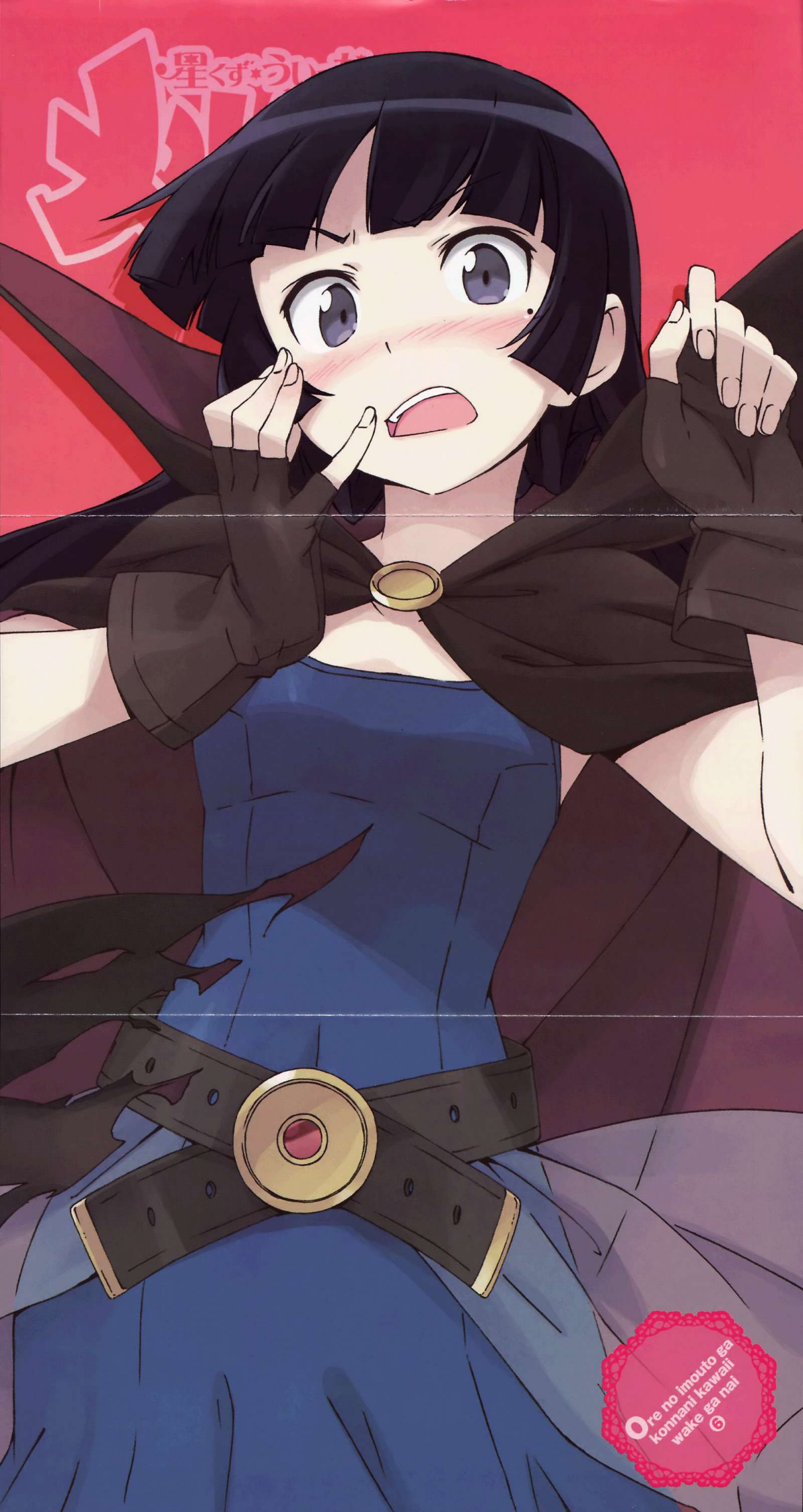
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Illustration・かんそきろわ





Character file.12
Bridget Evans



◆性別:女
◆年齢:10歳
◆身長:151cm
◆体重:43Kg
◆3サイズ:76/59/79

ブリジット・エヴァンス【ぶりじっと・えばんす】

◆メルルのコスプレ大会に出場するため、はるばる英国からやってきた女の子。その後、縁あってあやせと同じ事務所に所属することに。礼儀正しく真面目な性格で、若干押しに弱い。同僚の加奈子にいいようにこき使われている。

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第一章

Chapter 1

My little sister is Kousaka Kirino. She's extremely beautiful, good at studying, unbeatable at sports, and works as a reader model. She's that kind of third year middle school student.

As siblings we had had a bad relationship for a long time...no, that's wrong. Saying that our relationship was bad over-emphasizes it, it's more like we were both ignoring each other.

The little sister who is celebrating her brilliant life and the brother who is satisfied with the ordinary every day.

This brother and sister are like oil and water.

I kept my distance from my little sister who lived in a world that had no connection to me.

From my sister's perspective she probably looked down on her peace-loving older brother as a lazy person with no desire to improve himself.

While we lived in the same house, the wall between the two of us was thick.

In the first place our ways of thinking were too different and we never saw eye to eye.

A year ago that relationship of ours.....changed.

That's right. Since that summer day a year has already passed. It's really.....been quite fast.

It's too late to do things over now. I learned my sister's secret, gave absurd life counseling, various troublesome things happened, I was running around at a disgraceful pace...

For how many years did we yell at each other, abuse each other, and honestly conflict with each other.

She climbed over that thick wall and touched me directly with her hand.

This is something important so I'll say it as many times as I need to.

I hate my little sister. She also probably hates me.

That hasn't changed even now. It definitely won't change.

However.

Now I have to say that there's something to be proud of.

I hate her. But she's my precious family.

June. The day after my sister returned to Japan.

On that day after school I poked my head into the living room and my sister was sitting on the couch with her legs crossed having a seemingly fun conversation on the phone. Surely she said something about being busy with the procedures to return to her middle school today.....those matters are probably already finished.

It seems like something I've seen before, it's a nostalgic yet gloomy scene.

While my sister on the phone gave me a sidelong glance I shouted, "I'm home."

And then Kirino glanced at my face and lightly nodded her head.

".....heh"

If I think about how she would completely ignore me in the past, then I guess it's possible things have more or less gotten better.

I went to get something to drink. While doing that, the aforementioned little sister's speaking voice reached my ears.

"Yes. That's how it is...no, I haven't returned yet.....I haven't decided. That's why, please let me think about it a little longer, yes."

It seems like she was talking to somebody related to her model work.

It's unusual for her to use keigo[1]. I wonder if she doesn't intend on resuming her work.

.....it bothers me.

I opened the refrigerator and took out two cans of juice. I closed the refrigerator and gave my little sister a fleeting glance.

Kirino hung up the phone and then immediately started to call somebody else.

"Yaho Ran-chan. You may have already heard from Ayase but...I came back. Eh? Yeah, I intend to say here for a while. For the time being at least until graduation I feel something like studying seriously? Ehehe, sorry, I must have surprised you."

The one she's talking to now is probably a friend from school. She seems to be reporting on returning to Japan.

I opened a can of juice and placed it right in front of my sister. And then I sat across from her and started reading a weekly manga magazine.....it's not really like I wanted to be near my sister and went out of the way to try and read here, OK?

".....yeah.....then, sometime soon.....should we meet in Akiba[2]?"

Based on the contents of their conversation the person she's talking to now is probably Saori. When Kirino suddenly left Saori seemed quite angry but.....looking at her face it seems like she successfully mended their friendship. In Akiba.....yet again the conversation has turned into something about having a party.

It's possible that the day when Kirino, Kuroneko, Saori and I all get together again might come soon. It's been a while since all four of us were present.

".....that's also not so bad."

While my eyes were fixed on the manga magazine, I felt that my mouth loosen.

After that about thirty minutes passed. I finished the entire manga magazine I was reading.

It's unbelievable but my sister.....even now is still talking on the phone.

It's not like she's been talking to the same person the whole time. She would talk for a bit and then quickly hang up and call another person.....that kind of thing repeated over and over.

I was understandably shocked and just as she hung up the phone I chose to speak.

"......exactly how many people do you intend to call?"

"Hm? Mmm, I don't know. For now all of my friends. Even mailing them would be good but since it's been a while I wanted to hear their voices, and I wanted to tell them directly that I've come back, OK?"

"......is that so? Then sorry for getting in your way."

"That's right, you're in the way. Or rather, why have you been looking at me on and off for a while now? It's super disgusting."

"I-I'm not really looking at you. Don't misunderstand. It's just that it's a pain to drink juice in my room on the second floor and then have to come downstairs to throw out the cans one by one."

Tsk, as always the way she treats me is terrible. After all that trouble I went through when I was unusually worried about her for once. Being driven away and irritated I reluctantly got up from the sofa.

"Hmm"

Speaking of which, this girl was a popular person at school and such.

Since I only know her otaku friends, Kuroneko and Saori, I had forgotten about it.

Kirino has tons and tons of good friends who I don't know.

There are friends who she wanted to talk to but couldn't talk to while she was overseas...and now she probably wants to talk to them with all her heart.

It was like that with Kuroneko at the airport yesterday. There are other friends she wants to have a happy reunion with.

That's an entirely natural feeling but even though it was a heartwarming scene I wasn't that interested.

I don't really know why.

...So that's how my relationship with my little sister feels. It's a super embarrassing story when I remember it, but just a few days ago I flew all the way to America for the sake of persuading my sister to return to Japan.

Since that sort of thing happened, I had thought that my relationship with my sister would have changed somehow but.....I wonder how? I wonder if something has actually changed?

If I put it honestly, I've developed a strange awareness of my sister.

And yet it doesn't seem that way with her at all. As always the way she treats me is terrible.

No.....I think that.....there's no way that nothing has changed in our relationship.

That's right. When talking about human relationships, just one small thing can cause a huge disturbance.

Actually, something also happened with Kuroneko...

The next day after school. The location is the game research clubroom.

It used to be a place where you could leave things scattered around as much as you like, but thanks to a certain fastidious club member it has been tidied up quite a bit compared to in the spring. The eroge and promotional goods that were piled up to that extent were probably stowed away in a different dimension or something. The more I think about it the more the enigma only grows deeper.

In that sort of club room, since the regular game contest ended I wanted to show my face at least occasionally.

It was for the sake of seeing how Kuroneko was doing. Although she joined because of my recommendation, I couldn't neglect her.

Be that as it may, Kuroneko should already have a friend of the same gender in the club and at this point there shouldn't be any need for me anymore. But I really come by occasionally to see if Kuroneko is doing well, do some studying by myself, and chat with the other club members...it's that sort of feeling.

As a result today I decided to show my face in the club room, but this time my objective was a bit different.

"Hey."

"....."

"Heeey? Kuroneko-saaan?"

"......What is it? You're annoying."

Kuroneko stopped moving her hands and reluctantly turned her head towards me. I said in a tone of voice just like somebody addressing their lover,

"I-I just wanted to try calling you. ♥"

"If you don't have any business then please don't talk to me. You're in the way."

"....."

In response to my lovely way of addressing her, Kuroneko seemed to have a dumbfounded expression of all things. From the cold look in her eyes it doesn't seem like she took my lines at anything more than face value.

I couldn't detect even a fragment of sentimental things such as love and affection.

I-it's strange, isn't it. Even though earlier I received a kiss from her.

Since there are probably people here who have forgotten, this might seem a bit like boasting, but at that time behind the school building I was hesitating about going to meet Kirino but Kuroneko disparaged me, saying,

"......it's a 'curse'. It's a curse of death in case you give up midway."

And then she gave me a kiss that just touched my cheek.

With that strong push on the back she sent me out to bring my sister back.

That's right. Thanks to that I was able to safely bring Kirino back to Japan.....

Wait! If you think about it clearly, wasn't that a roundabout confession!? My heart has been pounding all this time.

Despite me feeling that way, why is it that even after doing that she doesn't have even a pretense of being shy? After seeing her act as if nothing happened I'll probably start thinking it was all a dream. Well actually, she already gave that impression the day before yesterday, but at that time it was her long-awaited reunion with her beloved Kirino, and right after that I

didn't think it was really the time or place. But now a day has passed and she's calmed down, yet her attitude is just as cold as ever.

It's an inconceivable anticlimax.

For instance last night I was lying around on my bed worrying, "Kyaaaaaa, if she is in love with me what should I dooo!?" I look like an idiot, don't I? It was quite shameless.

Look, if you were in my position what would you do?

You can't help but be interested in what on earth that was all about, right?

"Hey, Kuroneko. I said hey."

"......so what is it? Please cut it out."

It was almost like I could see the sound effect for irritation above Kuroneko's head.

I quickly brought my mouth near her ear and softly whispered.

"......That is......what did......that time before......that thing that happened behind the school building......"

"......"

"About that......what was......"

The end of these lines didn't make it through my mouth. Before I could confirm Kuroneko's reaction, bam! The door was opened with tons of energy and Sena flew into the room.

"Gokou-san, Gokou-san, Gokou-san! Please hear me out for a bit!"

This super-noisy big-breasted glasses girl is Akagi Sena.

She's not just Kuroneko's classmate but also the only other first year in the game research club.

By the way, it seems that "Gokou" is Kuroneko's real name (her human name).

Because Sena forced her way in here it marked the end of my questioning of Kuroneko.

Kuroneko said, "Huh," which for some reason seemed to be mixed with a sigh of relief.

"......I see another noisy one has come. What is it this time?"

"I was just browsing a doujin[3] game message board and somehow the game we made was being praised!"

So this woman was still continuing to look at reviews of the game she made on 2chan.

Yeesh, she's still at it.

By the way, given that Sena said "somehow the game we made was being praised!" please feel free to wager a guess about the reputation of the game we made, "Labyrinth of Greed", among the general population.

"Here, please look at what was written!"

Sena appeared to be in high spirits and showed her cell phone's screen to me and Kuroneko.

"I don't really have much desire to keep looking at this message board. There's nothing but slander written there."

"Now, now, Kousaka-senpai, please don't say that."

"Oh really? Then, ummm, let's see.....the latest messages are...oh, somehow there are quite a few! Or so I thought, but aren't they all from the same users."

"Yeah, it looks like somehow a fight broke out last night and the thread the two of them were arguing in grew quite long. But that's the reason why..."

The things the two users wrote on the message board while fighting were generally gave this sort of impression.

"i decided to give it a shot since people recommended it to me but it's a super-shitty game lol especially the game balance is the worst lol it's so difficult it can't be cleared like this lol"

"no, that's just because you suck at it. the game balance is fine"

"by defending it you're exposed lol you're probably the creator Samakourinotsu lol"

"in the first place the thing we were flaming was just the scenario. the game systems are quite refined"

"I see, that's certainly a fight. So, where was it being praised?"

I looked up from the phone's screen and Sena said, "......hmph" and seemed to be half-laughing.

"Please look at it properly, senpai. Even though the bright red user ID is saying negative things it seems to be just because he sucks and keeps dying. Look at what the person defending it wrote! He said the game systems are quite refined! Heheh, as a matter of fact I'm the one who made them!"

We made the game together so I know that! Rather than being surprised I'm happy for you.

That Sena, I don't understand how she can be this ecstatic just from reading a few words like that.

.....No, actually now that you mention it even I'm pretty happy.

After seeing the game that we worked so hard on received such sweeping criticism I started to feel like I never wanted to look at 2chan again.

Just by saying it myself I won't get anything out of it. But I still said it from the bottom of my heart,

"That's great."

"Yes! Iya~mo~, Suddenly I have tons of motivation! All right, let's do it!"

Sena rolled up her sleeves and seemed to be in incredibly high spirits. In contrast to her usual calm appearance she's shed her outer layer and exposed her true childish nature. But to be perfectly honest I like her more this way. It feels like it's possible that she might reveal something embarrassing or open up her heart.

Yeah. So cute.

By the way, if this was an eroge then after about nine more events there should be the possibility of getting an H scene so please tell me how.

Kuroneko, on the other hand, was making a difficult expression while Sena was saying "look, look" and shoving the phone's screen in front of her face. I think she ought to also be a little happy but I guess only a few words like that wasn't enough after all. In addition the guy flaming it probably ticked her off.

I'll try asking a bit.

"......say, Kuroneko, aren't you actually happy?"

"....."

Kuroneko didn't respond.

Even so.....after Sena headed towards her seat while euphorically bouncing around, Kuroneko murmured in a small voice that only I could hear.

".....That is.....actually, I'm.....the one who wrote that response."

"That's the punchline!"

So that's why she isn't happy! She wrote those words herself!

But...why would she do that sort of thing, in her case could it be for the sake of protecting her self-respect...it's probably not like that. If I take the contents of the message into account, then it's a no-brainer.

Crap, since Sena came my questioning of Kuroneko was left unfinished.

Since somebody got in the way this time I'll have to change my timing. Although thinking about it, lately there have been hardly any chances for me to be alone with Kuroneko. In the club room the other club members are around, and since either Sena or Manami is usually with us it's never just the two of us when we go home.

If I think about it, now that the pretext of working on making games is gone it's unlikely that Kuroneko and I will be alone together in the club room.

I'm lamenting that even now.

C-could it be that I had something incredible and completely wasted it.....!

No, if I really wanted to be alone with her then there's always the method of calling her out somewhere but.....unfortunately I don't actually have the

guts! To put it frankly, just asking that question earlier took all of what little courage I could muster!

It's the pathetic truth if I do say so myself. Feel free to call me chicken heart Kyousuke.

I thought about it while walking towards my house.

I wonder.....what does that Kuroneko think about me.

I asked about it before this. And then she.....do you know how she answered me?

I like you...

"I like you.....about as much as your little sister likes you."

.....

I sullenly kept my mouth shut, took out my cell phone, and looked up her number in the address book.

.....brrrring.....click. She picked up after one ring.

"What?"

Her response was apathy itself. To tell you the truth, the person I called was none other than Kirino.

I tried asking with a light feeling.

"Hey, about how much do you like me?"

"Huh? What are you saying?"

"....."

".....You know.....I did tell you my phone number and mail address. But other than in an emergency or important matter could you not call me? You're annoying."

Click.....beeeep, beeeep, beeeep.....

"She hung up! .....So.....in other words, that means that she hates me, right, the same as always."

That's right. That Kirino hasn't changed.....yeah, that's right.....even though so many things have happened.

But, if that's the case.

Does that mean that Kuroneko also hates me? No, no, that shouldn't be the case. Thinking that she likes me might just be me being overly self-conscious, but I wouldn't go so far as to think she hates me.

She kissed me after all!

.....So in other words what does it mean. In the end does she like me? Does she hate me?

Or is it neither of the above? Wow.....I don't get it at all.....

I'm in agony. I pouted my lips and looked at my cell phone while sulking.

I shouldn't have called that person. Somehow, hasn't my relationship with phones been too cruel lately? Ayase even blocked my number.....crap. Shit, my nose is running.....I wonder if I have a cold.

Kirino and Ayase had their reunion right after I got home from school. Ayase came to visit our house just as I was coming out of the bathroom. The second the door was opened she shouted,

"Kirinooooooooooooooooooooo! It's been too looooooooooooooooooooooooooong!"

"Hey, calm down Ayase....."

Ayase jumped into Kirino's arms, hugged her tightly, and buried her face in her chest.

She was so happy it was almost like the reunion of two lovers who had been separated for a lifetime.

"But, but.....*sniff*"

".....I'm back, Ayase."

"Yeah.....welcome home, Kirino."

The scene right before my eyes was just like when Kirino was reunited with Kuroneko at the airport.

"I'm sorry, Kirino.....actually I wanted to come and see you sooner but..."

"It's fine. You were doing your best at work, right. It would have been nice if I had seen you yesterday when I went to school for paperwork about returning, but you were in the middle of class so.....um.....guess what? When I was overseas I had every magazine you appeared in sent to me so I could read them."



"Really!? I'm happy.....h-hey, Kirino? You're going to be staying here from now on, right? If you were to go to another far-away place without saying anything again.....you won't do it, right?"

"Yeah.....I don't know about next year yet, but I intend to stay here at least through graduation."

"Is that so! That's great.....! Er, it might be rude to Kirino to say something like this but.....but about Kirino coming back to Japan.....I'm happy. Incredibly happy."

"Thank you, Ayase. I'm sorry for never contacting you."

.....I-Isn't it.....about time you two cut it out already.

What are you doing right in the entrance to somebody's house! And furthermore you're both girls!

It was so embarrassing I couldn't bear to watch.

I hurried up the stairs and took refuge in my room. And then,

"Hmm. Well, that's great, isn't it."

After I let out a light sigh I closed the door.

That's right, she was reunited with Kuroneko, made up with Saori, and at last was reunited with Ayase...

With this all of the turmoil from Kirino's return has been settled and that should mean it's time for a break.

All is well that ends well.

...or so I thought, but the next turmoil befell me immediately.

"Onii-san, I want to consult you."

"Again! .....H-Hey, Ayase, what do you intend to make me do this time?"

Just as I thought my little sister's life consultation had ended, this time my sister's friend is using that phrase.....explaining it again is troublesome, but we're at the park near my house.

Just like the previous time, I received a mail from Ayase on my phone which called me out to this place.

"Hm, somehow you seem irritated, don't you...Onii-san?"

Ayase was wearing her school uniform and puffed her cheeks slightly.

If I'm irritated it's because your requests are just like Kirino's and are never something decent.

"To put it frankly I don't really want to hear it."

"......If you just do this I'll stop blocking your number on my phone."

"Alright, leave it to me!"

"So quickly!?"

"Of course. You know, do you understand how much of a shock it was for me to have my number blocked by a middle school girl? About enough to make me weep with my nose dripping in the middle of town."

"......P-Please don't exaggerate so much."

I'm serious. It wasn't an exaggeration at all.

Seeing Ayase making a face that seemed to be thinking, maybe I did a bit of a bad thing to Onii-san and got carried away.

"Removing the block on my number is only natural...someday you should take responsibility for this."

"With regards to the matter of blocking Onii-san's number, that was only natural since you were being conceited.....but I would appreciate it if you would allow me to consult you this time.....there is no helping it.

Ayase looked up at me with a meek face and asked with upturned eyes.

"......About that taking responsibility, specifically what would you want me to do?"

"Marry me."

"I'm going to call the police."

Beeee

Damn it, suddenly a portable crime-prevention buzzer started ringing!

Even though it was just a joke!

Whaaaaaa! You bitch, do you intend to make me into a sex offender!?

I quickly raised both my hands and said,

"OK, I'm sorry, calm down! Onii-san got a bit carried away! So please stop the buzzer right away! People are starting to gather! ...Speaking of which isn't there a police box right in the back of the park!?"

"I know that. That's why whenever I meet with Onii-chan alone I always do it here."

"That's cruel!"

What an amazing lack of faith in me!

Click. Ayase pulled the cord coming out of her pocket one time and the sound of the buzzer stopped.

"Well, that was half a joke."

"Say it was all a joke!"

This is why I dislike meeting with this woman. It never turns into something decent!

No matter how incredibly cute she is, having the label of "sex offender" stuck on me every single time isn't good for my health. Well, there are also times when I reap what I sow.

Because that buzzer attracted so much attention we had to change locations.

Once things had settled down I asked her,

"So...what's this about a consultation?"

"Actually, it's about Kanako."

"Kanako? .....ah, that shitty brat who's the splitting image of Meruru. So what about her?"

"That girl entered the same office as me and is currently working as a model."

"......Seriously?"

Even though she was taken into custody for smoking she was actually hired.

"Yes. So, soon at the Akihabara UDX[4], Meruru...was it? It seems like there's an event about that soon. Kanako will be participating on that stage."

"Hmmm. Er.....is she cosplaying as Meruru?"

"Yes. It seems that she is cosplaying as Meruru."

"Is that.....really modeling work?"

Somehow it's different, right?

"Of course it's modeling work."

.....Though you said that with quite a smile. I started to realize that somehow that Kanako was successfully cajoled into this by her office. At any rate it's because she's stupid.

Well, Kanako is the splitting image of Meruru and when on stage she's quite skilled at fooling otaku, so there probably isn't a more suitable person. Their office probably understands that much so it's possible that's why they hired that shitty brat.

"......So, what's the problem?"

Pushing the conversation forward, Ayase smiled sweetly and said,

"Like the time before I want you to act as her manager again and attend to her."

"Why would you ask me to do that? If you're worried then you could accompany her yourself, couldn't you?"

"I have other business on that day, though....."

"At any rate, shouldn't your office provide an actual manager? Is there a reason to go out of your way to use a complete amateur like me?"

"There is."

Ayase suddenly let out a large breath, gazed at me, and abruptly changed the subject.

"I want you to prevent that girl from smoking."

"Ah, somehow, it was something like that?"

She said something like, "prevent that girl from smoking," lightly, but since it's her we're talking about this will probably be an extremely messy conflict.

If you don't mind me saying, each and every time this girl threatens something like, "I'll kill you," I get the impression she would even kill Kanako and bury her in the mountains. So on top of that, the image of her saying, "I want you to prevent that girl from smoking," with a smiling face comes to mind. She actually would kill.

Kanako is still alive, right? I'm worried.....

"Onii-san, you aren't thinking something rude, are you?"

"It's your imagination."

This girl is sharp.

"So, prevent her from smoking? Is it OK if I go help you bury her in the mountains?"

"You're wrong. I don't understand what you're saying at all...I want you to confirm whether or not Kanako is properly continuing her smoking ban."

"?"

"Look, that girl isn't in good form right now. That's why no matter how her mouth might promise, 'I'm sorry, I'm reflecting on it very much. I'll never smoke a cigarette again,' she actually won't smoke in front of us but it's possible that she's secretly smoking in places where she can't be seen."

".....Certainly, if it's her that's a possibility."

Actually.....don't make your friend say, "I'm sorry, I'm reflecting on it very much. I'll never smoke a cigarette again," in the first place, Ayase-san. I'm afraid to ask the specifics about that incident.

She continued on without learning my frightened innermost thoughts.

"You see? That's why I want to...confirm whether or not she has really quit smoking. I think that if it's Onii-san then Kanako will take you lightly and reveal her "natural" behavior."

You're also taking me lightly, aren't you.

"So you think that if she's in front of me, she might get lazy, stop holding back, and smoke a cigarette?"

"That's how it is."

"I understand that. But to do that, all we have to do is create a chance for me and Kanako to meet--so what do you think about this? Even a setting like a group date would work, right?"

When I asked that question Ayase narrowed her eyes angrily and pouted her lips.

".....Pervert, there's no way that would happen, is there. That's why I want you to be Kanako's manager and sneak into the event so that you can ascertain that much."

"Ah, I see, I see. There's no way this is connected to our earlier conversation."

My understanding is bad, isn't it.

"Yes. When I was questioning Kanako about her smoking she said when she wanted to smoke when...something like when she was 'irritated about something' or 'wanted to concentrate'. So if Kanako is going to smoke then I think that something like in the waiting room before the event is the perfect situation."

"That's the reason you want me, who she looks down on, to observe her. Hmm.....well, I understand but.....I'm not confident that I could be something like a manager."

I muttered that timidly but Ayase said in a lively voice,

"It will be OK. If it's Onii-san you can definitely do it. Even last time didn't you pull it off fine? It will be fine if you do it the same way."

"Is doing it like that OK?"

"Yes. It's perfect. Please have some confidence. Since I'm saying it there's no mistake."

"......Is that so? If that's OK then let's try it. Last time I just did things my own way and it worked out somehow or other."

Why is it that even though I'm not a professional I'm stuck with manager work and am being cheered on by Ayase? If I calm down and try to think about it this is a strange conversation, isn't it?

"Please do so."

Then Ayase gave me a radiant smile. She's truly an angel.

"......Ooh."

I was unconsciously blushing like a young maiden.

.....Uugh, in my whole life I'll never be a match for this woman.

I sighed lightly and then asked,

"By the way, if she is smoking then what do you intend to do?"

When asked that Ayase continued to smile like an angel but the radiance disappeared from her pupils.

"......Do you really want to know?"

"N-no."

Scary. Ayase-san is scary.

Hey, hey, Kanako, you've properly stopped smoking, right? If you were just saying that was easy I would say your life is in danger.....

And so happily my concerns turned out to be needless fears.

"Aaaaah, enough, I'm super pissed off. I need tobacco nowwwww."

The above-mentioned Kanako was squatting like she was taking a shit with an electronic cigarette buzzing in her mouth.

It was an image that gave the impression of a Showa-era[5] delinquent. Of course she was wearing her usual Meruru cosplay outfit and the amount of

exposure was extremely high. To put it frankly, it was as erotic as a string bikini. Be that as it may, at a glance she doesn't look like anything more than an elementary school student so did not rear its head at all.

By the way, an electronic cigarette is a device consisting of a cartridge with a liquid inside that uses electric power to convert it to a mist that can be smoked in place of a cigarette. Although it doesn't contain nicotine or tar, it can be used for the sake of quitting smoking.

"Peh! It's no good like this, seriouslyyy. Fruit flavors aren't something that should be smoked like this. I thought it might be cute so I bought it, but it hasn't done anything more than make the inside of my mouth full of sweetness."

Ummm.....

For the sake of completeness I ought to introduce her. This is Kurusu Kanako, one of Kirino's friends.

I accepted Ayase's consultation request and came here to check whether or not she has properly quit smoking. Hmm, given this situation it feels like my duty may have already been settled.

From how it looks now, hasn't she completely quit smoking?

Though it seems doubtful if she can keep this up for a long time.

It's the weekend. The location is the Akihabara UDX event participants' waiting room.

The event schedule was posted on the wall. According to it the event Kanako is participating in, "Meruru and Alfa ", isn't for about another 30 minutes.

In the waiting room is me, in the same sunglasses and suit disguise as last time, Kanako, cosplaying as Meruru, and one other person...

"Hey, Bridget. You, go buy me some juice."

"Eh, errr.....b-but, right now I'm reading the script....."

The pitiful one receiving this high-handed order and becoming frightening is Bridget Evans.

She's a girl with beautiful blonde hair. At the previous Meruru cosplay tournament, she's the girl who was Kanako's rival for the championship until the end. Right now she's also wearing the outfit of Meruru's rival, "Alfa".

With a black mantle as its characteristic feature, this is another sensational outfit. A see-through miniskirt and under that was something that looked like it was made from a school swimsuit with the indentation of her belly button completely standing out. It was a costume I would want to see Ayase wear by any means.

It was towards Bridget that Kanako was glaring at while squatting.

While tapping her with the staff that Meruru carries, "Booster Rod", Kanako said,

"Huh? What did you just say, it couldn't be, 'right now I'm reading the script.' Hurry up and get going. Ah, make it a strawberry Dororich[6]."

"......Kanakana-chan. The vending machines here don't sell that....."

"Hmmm, then you'd better run to the convenience store....."

"Fweeeh.....um.....but.....even though.....I'm.....cosplaying....."

"Get going, just like that. Hurry, dash."

Bonk

"Cut it out already you shitty brat!"

I couldn't help but want to smack her head. Thereupon this twin-tailed shitty brat looked up at me hatefully while holding her head.

"That hurt.....despite just being a newbie manager you would do that to a future idol!"

"Huh? Who's a future idol! You were just bullying a little girl!"

And furthermore she seemed to be really enjoying it! You're a total S[7]!

"Huuh? But Kanako's height is shorter than her's."

".....S-Stop splitting hairs....."

My head started to hurt! I can't believe this brat, her DQN[8] has surpassed even Kirino at her worst.

"...I get it. I'll go buy you your juice. Try to get along for a little longer, OK?"

"You.....why are you acting so full of yourself despite being a new manager? Addressing me so casually, at any rate having juice ready is your job moooooron! I'm definitely going to let the office know about this later!"

"Yes, yes, do what you want. I'm sorry for not noticing it."

I'm just an amateur so there's no way I can do things like a professional manager.

I can at least go and buy some juice, but since it was a demand from that shitty brat I hesitated a bit.

Ten minutes before the event began.

I bought them some drink and helped Bridget practice her script. After the previous cosplay contest, she had trained hard in Japanese. Now, she could hold a conversation without any problem, but reading is another story.

"…This…how to read this word?"

"You read it as 'massacre'. What a bloody script."

Well, Meruru got a lot of fighting scenes, so that is expected.

"…Thank you, manager-san."

"Don't worry, just ask me anything that you don't understand."

"Yes."

Bridget sat down next to me and smiled. She is such a gentle and well-manner girl. Her family had done a wonderful job.

She was living in UK back then, but now she had started performing in Japan in the same agency as Kanako and Ayase.

Still, does that mean Ayase's agency had joined in the otaku cultural?

I glanced at Kanako. This twin tailed brat is now lying on the sofa. Not only she was smoking, she pulled her short skirt far up, revealed her entire pantsu. Really….this place is not your home….

"Ah…so boring ---- hey you lolicon, come and massage my shoulders."

"You brat, who are you calling lolicon!"

Don't say something that will cause a misunderstanding, will you? But I'm acting as her manager today, so this order is not invalid.

"Yes, madam."

I slowly move toward the sofa. Kanako turned her back to me and ordered me to massage her shoulders. They are softer than I expected.

Kanako clearly enjoyed this, she said:

"Oh ~~~ so comfortable~"

"That's good to hear. Is this place alright?"

"…Ah ---- yes, that place ~ a little stronger…ehehe…."

She looked like she likes my massage very much. To tell the truth, despite that I'm used to listen to my little sister's arrogant order, but adding this brat made me feel a little ashamed.

A manager's job is harder than I expected.

"My back felt itch up, help me with that."

"This place?"

"No! Idiot! Below the bra strap…."

"You are so annoying…."

She didn't even look at her manager. I'm a man, you know?

"I leave it to you, manager-san."

"…The one who was showing her pantsu a minute earlier without care is now trying to get spoiled….."

I felt soooooo powerless. Seeing her true form now, all of my imagination had been destroyed. I felt sorry for all those moe-lover among otakus.

Is she going to be okay at this rate?

"So what ~ do you have a problem with that~ ?"

"No no no. Is this right --- ?"

"Ohehe …. A little to the side…."

"Don't make weird sound!"

I recovered and noticed that Bridget was looking at us, blushing madly.

"Ha…."

"…Yes?"

"Eh? Ah…it's nothing…I can't concentrate…"

"Ah – I'm sorry. Because this girl was too noisy."

Tick. I lightly knocked on Kanako's head.

"It hurts ~"

Kanako protested.

"What are you doing --- massage Kanako's ass now."

"Do it yourself! Say, are you going to be okay without looking at the script? Isn't it going to start soon?"

"Hmm? Script? Hm, I only need to read that one."

What are you talking about you brat? You are really an idiot who is trying to act smart.

Then I will give you a little test.

"So….how about we check it a little?"

I spoke with Kanako, also gave Bridget a smile:

"About that, Bridget, can you recheck it with her?"

"Al..right"

"Tch, so annoying. Forget it, if Bridget is going to do it, then I will do it too."

Although Kanako was surprised with Bridget's decision, she agreed to practice. I (in a stiff tone) began to read the part belonged to the host.

"We are going to celebrate our guest. Today, we invited two special guests from 'Stardust ☆ Witch Meruru cosplay contest'. Let's welcome Kanakana-chan and Bridget-chan ----"

" ----- In short ~ I'm now working in the same agency as Bridget ~ We already have a great relationship, don't we?"

"Um! Yes!"

" --- Um ~ back then I was ~ shocked ~ to find out that Clara is going to sing together with me. This is going to be an unforgettable memory of mine ~"

I never expected Kanako to really memorize the entire script. I was checking when they talked --- but there was no mistake. She could repeat them without problem. She is such a nature-born actress.

Because of my shock, I asked her directly:

"Eh? Aren't you an idiot?"

"Hey, who are you calling an idiot ~~! I have received the money, of course I will get the job done! Are you an idiot? Is there any idol that went to the stage just for show? Don't look down on me because Kanako is so cute, got it?"

"---- Ah, sorry sorry. My bad."

I quickly apologize to Kanako. She was right. She is a professional idol.

She will get her job done. She understood it perfectly.

Sometime, this brat is too casual, sometime she shows an idiot side.

But at the right time, she could become serious to deal with it.

I couldn't hide my admiration toward this girl

At this time, Kanako raised her wand and poked at Bridget's forehead and said:

"Say, what is wrong with you, Bridget --- your speech is so stiff. Can you relax a bit?"

"But…but…I have to follow the script…"

"Idiot ~ it's fine even if you don't follow the script. I will cooperate with you. There was no script at the cosplay contest right? You just show them your cute side, that is enough."

"Even if you said that….but I can't help but nervous…today is an official cosplay event….If I failed….it will affect badly on Al's image too…."

"You are overthinking – it's just an anime, what could come out of this?"

"It – it's not just an anime! Don't look down on Meruru!"

"Alright alright, I got it already! It's not just an anime. That was my fault, okay?"

Kanako spoke while laughing.

Bridget was on the verge of tears, her body was trembling.

Her eyes turned serious, she said:

"I hate Kanakana-chan…"

"Eheheh, whatever ~ if you don't like it, then just show that to me on the stage. Don't worry --- you only have to turn those otaku into your cute worshipper."

I don't know if she is an idol or an idiot.

Worshipper?

"How…how could you said that! It was too rude to those people who came to see us!"

Although Bridget said that, but just thinking about all those otakus's frenzy made me realize that Kanako was not wrong.

While teasing Bridget, Kanako turned to me:

"Hm? Why didn't you stop me this time?"

"I won't."

Because I knew that you weren't making fun of her, so there was no need to stop you.

I took a look at the clock, said:

"It's about time ----"

"Got it ---------"

"Yes ------"

"Go, you two. Do your best!"

This event was held in Akihabara UDX under the official name 'Stardust ☆ Witch Meruru season 3 – A thanks for fans before broadcast". Just as this said, this event was to prepare for the broadcast of Meruru season 3 in the next month.

The content included seiyuu talk show, theme song concert, opening preview images. Kanako and Bridget also were invited as special guests. They are going to sing in this event with the seiyuus.

In the central hall, aside from the main stage, there were some other shops. It had been a while when they started, there were quite a long line at the counter, which extend outside.

Just like Comiket, otakus is willing to line up to get a limited good.

"It is so exiting…."

There are more people than the cosplay contest.

In front of the stage were reserved seats and standing seats with a space for relevant personnel. I'm sitting here with a staff identification card around my neck. Wearing a suit here is so hot.

The main event had started. The stage is now showing Meruru season 3 preview. Then the host began to explain for everyone.

" --- That's right! Just like the preview said --- this time, Meruru is the villain!"

Wowowowow --- the crowd broke into a series of whisper and shout.

That was the first time I heard of it too. So Meruru turns into the villain…just like Son Goku in Dragon Ball turns into villain, right? What a terrible twist.

It's as bad as Fate-san's situation.

Although aside from this explanation, the host (a girl) was wearing EX Meruru (dark witch mode – no, dark witch version 4) clothes, which made everyone excited. Even someone without any interest in anime like me felt my heart raced.

"After the second season, Meruru has become the strongest Stardust Witch in the universe --- but then she turns into a dark witch! And the one who opposed her is the new protagonist group here!"

After that, the big screen behind her showed the new heroines.

They were a gentle and prudent girl, a blonde girl with sharp eyes and a ojou-sama with long hair. Their name in order were Stardust Witch Aries, Cancer, Virgo.

"Don't you think they are cute?"

Everyone in the hall shouted "So cute -------"

"Thank you everyone --- today we asked the seiyuu of them to come today and tell you about details. Next, we are going to have a special battle. The main protagonist of the second season, Meruru had won many battle with overwhelming magic power --- but this time she is the enemy. To fight against this strongest dark witch, the new protagonist had used a plan to engage Meruru in a team battle. Of course, the girl who is both of Meruru's good friend and her rival is going to take part in this fight too – this is going to be a battle full of drama and tension ~ everyone, please look forward to it!"

Wowow -------! Awesome, Meruru!

The excitement otakus roared. They were so loud that people might wonder if they had lost their mind.

Because it was too noisy, I turned at them and immediately saw them almost break into the stage.

It was like a zombie movie.

But this time, I'm here as a manager, so I didn't feel disturbing because of them anymore.

I even felt grateful because of them. That was so strange.

And then, the event continued – soon, now is Kanako's turn.

"Please welcome our special guests! Today, we invited two winner of the 'Stardust ☆Witch Meruru cosplay contest' to join us today ~ welcome Bridget-chan and Kanakana-chan ~~!"

Right after that, Bridget and Kanako entered the stage.

"How are you, everyone ~~~~~~~~~~~~ I'm Stardust Witch Meruru ~ ah, no. I'm Kanakana-chan, please to meet you ~~!"

"That is the legendary real life Meruru ---!"

"So cute!"

"You are so cute Kanakana-chan!!!"

"Bridget ---!!"

"I always watch your picture at nico nico anime!"

"Th…Thank you! I hope everyone have a good day!"

Bridget politely waved back to her fans. From the quick conversation just now --- look like she posted her cosplay pictures in the internet.

(That was the first time I heard it.)

Her pictures from a year ago in another Meruru cosplay contest must have caught a lot of attention among fans and entered the ranking in niconico website. Maybe that was why Bridget agreed to come back to Japan the second time.

She once happily told me "I worked very hard with my housework, so I can visit Japan with Papa." She didn't even think that she will someday work as a model in Japan.

" ----- A year ago, I never thought thing will turn into this."

I understood that feeling. A year ago, I didn't even think that someday I will talk with my little sister again.

I thought that my way of life is the best suitable for me. But life is unpredictable. No matter good or bad things, you couldn't prevent it happened to you.

I glanced around and saw that even some foreigners nearby was interested.

Otaku cultural had already spread all over the world.

I think it's a good things.

Everyone surely liked them. I haven't seen such excitement since Meruru and Clara appeared.

Right then -----

A familiar voice rang outside of my vision.

"Oh yeah ---! Kanakana-chan---! Bridget ---! You guy are so cute! Oh yeah! Like an angel! "

That was Kirino's voice, without a doubt! I totally forgot about her! How could she not know about this! What angel? Even she is my little sister, I still found her disgusting.

Say, Kirino, can't you see that this moe girl in the stage is your classmate? I turned my head to her voice's direction.

My little sister was wearing a glasses and the suncap that I lent her in the similar situation --- and she wasn't alone.

"Ah….."

Let me rephrase it a bit.

My eyes locked with Kuroneko's. She also noticed me – her eyes widened.

"..Why…why is he here…"

Although Kirino and Kuroneko were both on the first line, I had no way to talk with them.

But at least I understood that Kuroneko came to this event together with Kirino.

I overheard Kirino said:

"Damn it ---- I knew that I should have bought a seat ---! I want to see Meruru and Al-chan on the stage…! Say, why did you invite me without preparing a seat!"

"Hm, standing is enough for this kind of event. Your news gathering skill suck. You wouldn't even know about this without me telling you. Shouldn't

you kneel down and worship me? Beside, that Meruru girl can see you from there just fine."

"That's right! But what do you mean 'my news gathering skill suck?'…I was so busy after returning, that can't be help. Still, thank you."

"Hm, you didn't look like a bit sincere."

"No, truly, thank you very much. Isn't hanging out with you enough?"

"…What…kind of thank is that?"

"? Aren't you happy right now?"

"……Whatever. Next time, I will invite Saori and your brother too. I have had enough of hanging out with you alone."

"Hm…say, since when you become so familiar with Meruru? Did you drink something wrong?"

"It's not important."

"Ahaha ~ look like when I wasn't here, you were so lonely that you watched the DVD I lent you. I imagined that you watched them with a smile, right?"

"You are so noisy. Don't make assumption like you saw it with your own eyes. I only watched Meruru to criticize it, there is no other reasons."

"No other reasons (laugh). Really?"

Haha.

It has been so long since I saw them quarreling. They really are a nature born pair. In a few months that Kirino left, I paired up with Kuroneko – so I understood that feeling.

"The ex-lover is the most beautiful one" – that old saying is somehow suited their situation.

Still, this is good.

It was worth bringing Kirino back based on my own desire only.

On the stage, Kanako and Bridget's performance has finished ----

"Stardust ☆Witch Meruru Third Season Preview" has finally reached the conclusion.

Bridget and Kanako's performance was the most popular event. For them, that must be a successful event.

And for me, that marked that I had finished Ayase's request.

That is wonderful. She will unblock me from calling her. I can't help but smile.

Next – when I entered the rest room, Kanako was lying on the sofa with half of her clothes removed.

"Hey, you --- what are you thinking, lying down while looking like this?"

"Ah, manager, listen to me. That brat stabbed Kanako in the stomach ~"

On closer look, Kanako was on the verge of tears, she was pressing on the stomach.

"Are..are you okay? Bridget stabbed you? When…?"

"During our performance ~ before the song with Clara, there was a small battle scene, right?"

"Um…"

You meant the battle scene between Meruru and Al-chan that was showed during the first season? --- yeah, I remembered that.

"…Are you going to stand up again, Meruru…Why are you doing this? Your magic wand is useless against my sword. You have no chance of winning."

"…Because, Al, you are my best friend!"

"I have promised you! I wanted to go to the park with Al…So…I will not lose!"

"Interesting…!"

---- That was what they showed in the stage just now, Meruru VS Al .

The touching part is that it marked the first time Meruru loses to an enemy, and she later swears that she will bring her friend back (Kuroneko also once said that she had no idea where is the touching part.)

"In short, because Bridget tried too hard, she stabbed you in the stomach too hard?"

"That's right! She had gone to call a doctor, but I will teach that brat a lesson when she get back!"

Ah – no wonder I didn't see Bridget anywhere. But consider how nervous she was, I think it was just an accident. She is not the type to purposely stab Kanako because of her feeling. My little sister might have done that, but that blonde gentle girl would not."

"Let me see your wound for a moment…."

I took a look at her stomach and saw that the wound had reddened and swollen.

Although it wasn't a big deal, but seemed like it hurts a lot.

"It didn't look too bad, but your stomach surely is too soft…"

Kanako looked like she just taken a heavy blow. She must unable to accept my words.

Ah….I didn't mean that you are fat or anything…Although it sounded rude, but I actually want to say that…your stomach is as soft as a child….

"You --- what did you just say to a girl….Ouch it hurts…."

"Hey hey, don't push yourself."

Looked like it hurt so much that she didn't have the energy to lecture me again, Just like Kirino, she was so cute when she showed me her weak side.

"So that mean you endured it until the end!"

"Of course – although I remind myself that 'damn brat, just wait until I kill you' but I still have to maintain a disgusting smiling and friendly face ----"

Despite her words, I think that professional attitude is worth rewarding. No wonder it sounded so familiar, my little sister is always saying that.

Is that what they call 'people with the same attitude hang out together'?

With teary eyes, Kanako looked up at the clock.

"That damn brat is too slow. How long does she going take to get to the infirmary. Too slow!"

"Let me go take a look."

"There is no need --- I need to go to the toilet right now. The toilet is next to the infirmary, right? Oh ~~ hurry up and lend Kanako a hand."

"…Right right…."

Although it is an emergency, but can you do that alone? You seemed to have trouble standing.

And so, I lent Kanako a hand (she was trembling because she couldn't hold it in for long) and guided her to the infirmary.

On the way, Kanako suddenly "Ah"

She pointed her wand at the front.

I looked forward and saw Bridget with a male foreigner here. That was a big and muscle man, who wore a jean with Al-chan printed T-shirt.

He was showing an obscene smile and talking with Bridget.

Because they were speaking very fast in English, I didn't know what were they talking about.

But from the look of it, this foreign otaku wasn't going to let Bridget go. Beside, there were around five or six similar foreigners around, all of them spoke in English. They surrounded Bridget and didn't leave any way out.

Say, this place should be limited for related personnel only. How could they get inside?

"They…."

I could feel that next to me, Kanako had become alerted.

At that time, something unexpected happened.

The big foreigner who was talking to Bridget suddenly hugged her. Although Bridget tried to push him away, but he only drew closer – then he rubbed his cheek with her face.

"Hey…!"

I was already started moving, but someone beat me to it.

"What are you doing -----!"

That was Kanako. She suddenly brushed my hand off and rushed forward.

"Kana --- kana-chan?"

Bridget turned back in surprise. While Kanako waved her wand and ----

Violently rammed it at the man's face. Even this is just a toy, but the damage had been done. This man took a step back in pain..

"Oh…."

"Get away from Bridget! What are you intent to do with Kanako's idol!"

"You…what…are you doing?"

I immediately run to their side, but Kanako looked at me with murderous eyes and roared:

"Noisy! Are you a man or not! Hurry up and call someone, useless!"

Damn, she had completely lost it…! Seeing that, the other foreigners slowly encircled and approached them. Kanako waved her wand non stop at them.

"…Shit!"

They didn't dare to come too close. Kanako pulled Bridget aside and stood in front of her.

"Ka…Kanakana-chan…why?"

Seeing Kanako in anger, Bridget was confused.

Kanako glared at her and said in anger:

"Are you an idiot? If those creepy approached you, you have to scream for help! What would you do without Kanako?"

"….."

This girl…

On closer look --- Kanako was also trembling, her eyes were moist.

Although she is an idiot, but she was scared too.

From the look of it, she might had similar experience before. But despite that, she still spoke in a firm and serious tone:

"Hey, fat pig. I will let you go this time, hurry up and get lost!"

Kanako looked at the big foreigner and thrushed her want at his direction

Just like a witch facing a huge opponent

"Otherwise ~ I will burn you to ashes!"

She didn't have to say that. Everyone here could see her determination.

Although their body build is as different as chalk and cheess, but the foreigner stepped back. However, at this time….

"Kanakana-chan! You are wrong! This is ----"

Bridget hastly said :

"This is my father!"

"Wh..What?"

Kanako turned her head to Bridget and asked in confusion :

"Father?"

"Yes, my father."

"Fa…father….you said…But you are so young…."

Knock

"It hurt!"

"What are you going to tell to a little girl!"

Although it was a bit late, but I succeeded in interrupting her. Hearing Bridget said 'father' made me remember – I overheard that when I was acting as their manager….

It was hard to believe, but…..

"This big foreigner is Bridget's father."

"Liar! They are totally different! How could that fat pig genes give birth to such a child as Bridget?"

"I think so too, but that is the truth."

Because he didn't understand Japanese, so we quarreled right in the spot.

That is right ----

At first glance, this is a scene of a creepy disgusting otaku who is going to sexually harass Bridget, but the truth is a loving father encouraged his daughter of her successful performance. Later, I also heard from Bridget that all of the other foreigners are her relatives who came to Japan to cheer her up. On closer look, all of them did have a peaceful smile.

"What….what?"

Didn't I tell you already?

Kanako's protection of Bridget from Evan-san is a big misunderstanding.

Evan-san rubbed his face, he seemed to already understand what is going on, because he didn't get angry. He only said in an apologetic tone:

"Haha, sorry, Meruru."

The one was hit - Evan-san was apologizing to Kanako, thus embarrassed her. She muttered:

"Hm ---! Don't do something that will cause a misunderstanding!"

Saying that, Kanako walked toward the toilet.

While Bridget followed her. She hugged Kanako from behind, just like a girl who wanted to get spoiled by her elder sister.

"Thank you, Kanakana-chan~"

"Don't bother me, brat! I have to make myself clear, I wasn't trembling because I was afraid of your father! I was trembling because I need to go to the toilet!"

"Just now Kanakana-chan is just like Meruru, so cool."

"Disgusting – are you listening to me? You are taller, don't lean on me!"

I quickly used my cell phone to capture this image.

Because this precious image is going to be a good present for my little sister.

Chapter 2

"Hello, Onii-chan? Yes, I heard about it too. Looks like after that, Bridget-chan became very fond of Kanako, not only that but the contest was a great success too. Thank you so much!"

"It was nothing really – I'm glad that I could help."


第二部

"And I really mean it. Thank you very much for your hard work, Onii-chan."

"No need to thank me. So…er…I did what you asked…so…"

"I understand. I will remove you from my block list."

"That's good!"

"But please don't call me too much! It troubles me."

"……"

"What…just happened? Why did I hear something fall?"

"Sorry, your words made me fall to the floor."

"You…you…how do you expect me to respond? By the way….recently, aren't you paying too much attention to me?"

"Of course. I like you."

"Please…please stop with those honey-coated words. You didn't even realize that I blocked you for half a year…."

"That's exactly why I need to deepen our relationship now!"

"Are you still talking nonsense? Really… I will get angry if you keep joking! Ah…because of you I don't feel like I should have thanked you anymore…"

"Hm? There is something else besides removing me from your block list right?"

"Didn't you want me to 『take responsibility』?

"Yeah, I did say that…. But I meant it as a joke."

"You…you…that's why I can't trust you! Liar!"

"Sorry, sorry! So --- how were you intending to thank me?"

"That's a secret – but I'm sure you will like it!"

"Ha ha, good good. I'm looking forward to it."

---- That was my conversation with Ayase last night.

It is morning. I'm heading toward my school. On a nearby corner, I meet Manami.

"Ah, Kyou-chan."

This plain girl is Tamura Manami, my childhood friend.

"Morning."

"Morning."

After that simple greeting, I signaled Manami "let's go to school."

"Uh..Um…About…Kyou-chan?"

"Huh?"

With sleepy eyes, I turned around and faced Manami's hopeful gleam:

"So…how is it?"

"How is what?"

"About…it…"

Blushing, Manami looked down. Then after a while, as if she made a decision, she looked up again, and asked me:

"Today….do you notice anything different about me?

"Nope."

"Ah, no?"

"Hey, what's with that? Suddenly raising your voice like that, I was shocked, you know?"

I dryly replied, while Manami kept blushing.

Was she getting more and more angry?

"Oh…oh…carefully look at me again!"

"Even if you say that…"

I didn't notice anything different at first, so I tried to carefully look at her again. Hm…did your breast get bigger? No no….ah….

"Manami, your hair."

"So? What about my hair?"

Her face brightened, so that must be the correct answer. I answered her truthfully:

"Your hair looks like you just woke up!"

"There is no way that could be true! Kyou-chan you idiot!"

[Scene break]

This was break time. Manami came to me and asked:

"Is something wrong, Kyou-chan?"

"Hm? What?"

"Because you look different today…"

Manami was angry at me for the whole morning (I still don't know why), but now she's worried and came to me? Ah…this is wonderful to have such a caring granny.

That's why like a spoiled grandchild, I could tell her everything.

"Actually, something has been bugging me for a while."

It would be cruel to tell her something meaningless.

"Can you listen to me for a while?"

"Sure."

Manami gave me a gentle smile. I smiled, too.

"This is about my sister."

Next, I told her my problem. Manami kept listening to me without saying anything.

"Um…so, in other words, after you forced Kirino to come back from America, her attitude still remains unchanged and that made you uncomfortable – right?"

"Yeah, something like that."

"Um --- yes, it doesn't look good…"

Huh? You guys don't understand? Okay, let me make myself clear.

It had been a while since I raised a flag with my sister, but I didn't get any event – yeah, that's the feeling of lacking something. Ah, of course I didn't want to see something happen between me and Kirino – in fact, just thinking about it made me want to vomit!

But considering what happened, I did change. But no matter how much I cared for Kirino, she didn't treat me any different – I'm kind of disappointed because of that.

"I felt like something should happen, but…."

"In other words, your relationship with Kirino-chan didn't improve like you expected, right?"

"No…of course not."

"Really? This year – Kyou-chan, you are always talking about Kirino-chan, aren't you? I thought your relationship was already good."

"Aren't I always complaining about her?"

"But when Kirino-chan went to America, you felt very lonely, right?"

"Yes…I did feel very lonely. But so what? You would feel the same if your family members suddenly disappeared right?"

"Ah…why are you angry?"

"Ah…so noisy…"

I patted Manami's head, while she tried to stop me. "Although, yeah, my relationship with Kirino did improve a bit."

"But everything could be undone in a second. I did force her to come back after all. There is nothing I could do if she decided to hold a grudge."

Of course, I'm sure that Kirino will never hate me because of that.

But that didn't change the fact that I forced her to abandon her dream half way. Deep inside her heart, she surely would have some complaints. I was fully aware of this fact from the beginning, but I still decided to bring her back.

"I knew that action might destroy our relationship far beyond repair."

I raised a flag with my sister, but this wasn't a love flag.

There was no imouto-route, nor imouto ending.

"If she ignored me like a year ago, I'd be fine with that. I'm fully prepared to accept it. But she treated me like before she went to America, so I'm kind of disappointed."

There was no way for our relationship to remain unchanged, but no matter how I look, nothing changed at all.

That's a very, very strange feeling.

"Even if Kirino-chan hated Kyou-chan because of that, I doubt your relationship would crumble in just a single day. You worry too much, Kyou-chan."

"I don't think you understand…."

Maybe I was wrong when I told her about it.

But when Manami showed me her gentle smile, it made me comfortable.

"Because I'm the one who understands Kyou-chan's kindness better than anyone else."

"…How could you say that with a straight face…?"

Me? Kindness? You are much kinder than I am.

"Isn't that right? He heard that his little sister was in trouble, to which he immediately went after her to America?" "Ugh…."

So now even you tease me?

"Besides, the last time I spoke with Ayase-chan, she said 『Kirino has been talking about her brother non-stop this year』."

"Ayase said that?"

"Yes. But she quickly lost her temper."

…Ayase and Manami? This strange couple again? They really have become good friends? But if this information came from Ayase, then it must be true. Hm, whatever, this didn't mean anything anyway.

Manami raised one of her fingers, and told me in an I-understand-everything tone:

"Besides, if I were Kirino – I could understand why she treated you like before."

"Why?"

"Because she is embarrassed."

"Wh...What?"

Manami smiled at me:

"If I were to study aboard…then I felt depressed because I couldn't handle it. And then despite all odds, Kyou-chan came to bring me back…I would be very happy. But I also would feel very embarrassed, so I would try to act like nothing happened in front of Kyou-chan."

"Hey… for real?"



Noticing my reaction, Manami smiled, and continued:

"That's why, Kyou-chan, there is no need to worry. From now on, your relationship with Kirino-chan will only improve."

"Hmm…I never wanted it to change in the first place."

I looked away, and whispered:

"Still, thank you."

"Yeah, yeah, no problem."

Embarrassed, Manami rubbed her head. By the way, your hair really looked like you just woke up. Why didn't you fix it?

"By the way, Kyou-chan, you said you have some troubles, so what is the other?"

"There is another one, but I couldn't tell you about it."

"You couldn't tell even me?"

"Especially you."

"Ahh…. In that case, please tell me if there is anything I could do to help."

"Sure."

[Scene break]

"I'm so jealous of you."

After Manami went back to her seat, Akagi told me that.

Akagi Kouhei. Normal average student, with short brown hair. My classmate.

By the way, while his little sister, who is a first year in our school, is a hardcore homo fan, he is not. Probably.

"It's not so bad."

"Among my friends, you are the only one who could say that in this situation."

"Whatever, do you need something?"

"Yeah, Kousaka, are you free next Sunday?"

"Hmm, I currently have no plans. So?"

"In that case, can you please come with me? I need to go to a certain place."

"Hmm…."

Recently I always hang out together with my otaku friends, so I was unable to spend time with my non-otaku friend. Well, going to visit somewhere else aside from Akihabara wasn't a bad idea.

"Okay, so, where do you plan to go?"

"Akihabara."

"….."

Seems like I was unable to escape the otaku life.

So, next Sunday morning, we went to an eroge shop.

"Ah, I'm so embarrassed Kousaka! Why did you lead me to this place?"

"That's my line! Why did I have to go to Akihabara with you?"

"Ah…ah ha…."

Akagi laughed nervously. He was holding a game bag, which contained homo eroge that his sister requested.

Thank you, Akihabara. At the very least, it helps us to buy eroge without worrying about someone seeing us.

I quickly stepped outside and told Akagi:

"I didn't know that this shop sold BL games too."

"Well, most of those games are only sold in Ikebukuro. You can only find the top rated BL games there!"

I didn't even want to know where you get them.

"So? Does my task end now?"

"No no. The truth is, I planned to buy that BL eroge alone. I wanted you to come with me to somewhere else."

"I see.."

So that's why you came to Akihabara instead of Ikebukuro?

"So? Exactly where are you leading me to?"

"Nice question!"

Akagi showed me a bright smile:

"Kousaka, we are now seniors – that means we are eighteen. Can you understand that?"

"I don't understand what you mean. Make it clearer, damn it!"

I shot him a death glare. But somehow it made him even more excited:

"Play along will you! Anyway, I mean now, we are eighteen. We can openly enter an eroge shop without fear – this is the main purpose of today's shopping!"

"So what? You want me to go in an eroge shop with you? Why don't you go in alone?!"

"I couldn't. I'm…afraid…"

"Afraid? You can go buy homo eroge for you sister, and yet you are afraid of going to an eroge shop alone?"

"This is different! Please Kousaka, go with me!"

"Stop stop! Don't come any closer, it's disgusting!"

I tried to back off.

Huff…huff…okay, Kirino once asked me to do the same thing, but …why now that a male friend of mine asked me, why did it feel so gross?

"I still don't understand why you can get courage if I come with you."

"Please just help me. Don't you want to come in and take a look for yourself?"

"…Just to make sure…what kind of eroge shop do you want to visit?"

"Ah…. I want to visit a sex toy shop. The truth is, I'm very interested in that 18+ only shop."

"How could you say that…."

"This is normal for a male high school student right? You must be interested in them too right?"

Yeah…I couldn't deny it. I had only come to Akihabara a few times to buy eroge for Kirino, but due to age restrictions and most of the time I came together with my female friends…. So I didn't have a chance to take a good look around.

Yeah…maybe this is a good chance for a social experience.

It would be fine if I just take a look.

"Hey, pervert. Your face is showing a stupid grin!"

"Hm, you're just overthinking."

That's how I am. Once I decided to do something, I will become quite active.

Ahahaha. Although I still came to Akihabara, but it wasn't too bad to come with a male friend.

Unlike with a certain girl, when the smallest mistake would cost me greatly. Like "Sexual harassment", "Perverted!", "Gross!" or something like that.

I am a normal teenager, why do they all misunderstand me?

To be honest, I only hang out together with Akagi or Kirino (and sometimes Kuroneko). In my opinion, this wasn't too bad compared to boys my age.

I happily replied:

"Fine, let's go Akagi. Have you ever been to that store before?"

"Yeah, but I only looked from the outside. This is my first time going inside."

"Understood"

"Look, here we are."

So fast. Is it that close?

Akagi pointed toward a shop with a ridiculous name "Sex Toys Department Store • Love Lucy Poster". Combined with the yellow and white themes, this shop smelled suspicious.

I saw a lot of models and dolls behind the windows.

"Are those…'love dolls' isn't it? Were they seriously trying to sell them?"

Probably. I couldn't believe it myself.

What does Akagi want to buy here? This shop was decorated quite simply, a nearby sign told me that the first floor was DVDs and books, and the second floor was male-only items and so on.

"Male-only items? Akagi, what do you intend to buy here?"

"Yup, on the fifth floor."

"What exactly do you intend to buy?"

"Of course, a present for Sena."

…A present for your sister huh…

What can you buy in this place? Do you have a brain or not?

Besides, the fifth floor – it says the fifth floor sells…female … cosmetics? Huh? What? Don't tell me….

"Aka..Akagi…do you intend to give your little sister *** as a present?"

"No way. She will definitely disown me!"

"Phew…you scared me to death…"

"What do you think about me? There is no way a brother could give his little sister *** as a present. I planned to give Sena a very normal present."

"If that's the case – so what exactly are you planning to buy?"

"SM equipment, A tight leather jacket and…."

"What is the difference? How could that be normal? Anyway, I got a little sister too, so I will give you this advice as a brother …you are so disgusting!"

To protect their good relationship, I must tell him the truth. Buying eroge for your sister is one thing, but this? What are you thinking? Even faced with my criticism, Akagi still remain the same:

"Ah…well I think that Sena would want that. She didn't tell me to buy it, but she will definitely like it."

"Hey heyheyhey! Stop that creepy laugh. You said your sister would like it? Why does she need SM equipment? What does she need it for? Don't tell me…she planned to use that on you?"

"Well, she once told me that she needs them for references. That's normal right? With the real thing at hand she could draw it better right?"

"Ah…ah…"

I was not entirely sure.

"So should we take the elevator straight to the fifth floor?"

"No way. Kousaka my friend, this is a rare chance, let's take a look around first."

"You seem very excited, Akagi."

I could feel your excitement from here. You really looked forward to this chance didn't you? Your sister's present is just an excuse, right? Last Christmas, Kirino also gave me this feeling when we visited Shibuya.

Because Akagi had started walking, I could only follow him unwillingly (that's the truth).

"What is with this guy…."

I signed and took a look around.

This shop looked way smaller from the inside. To my left was the elevator, in the middle was the counter, to my right was the stairs. The counter also sold bags of all kinds.

First floor was the DVD shop, books (read: erotic manga and DVD). It was the same as any other 18+ DVD shop. Why did I know that? Please don't ask. Just don't.

We were the only customers there.

"Hey Akagi. There is nothing here."

"Yeah, let's go to the basement."

He immediately moved toward the basement. I could only follow him. B1 floor was the same as 1F, with only one major difference.

This was a big screen showing some demo DVD with high volumes.

"Ahhh."

"Ohhhh."

Like that….

"…I can hardly stand it anymore…"

Here, I felt the pressure I always felt whenever I went into an eroge shop.

You guys understand right? Even a hardcore eroge fan started as a noob, everyone once had this feeling right?

I wiped my sweat, and asked Akagi:

"Hey…can we…go up now?"

Akagi turned back to me, his eyes filled with excitement:

"Kousaka! This shop is awesome!"

"How could you know it so quickly?"

Is this really your first time?

"So? Do you plan to buy something here Akagi?"

"Not really…I'm still considering my options. The truth is I plan to buy a motorbike, so I couldn't afford something too big….Hzzzz. Damn."

He dropped down, his face hung between his knees.

So what? You still want to buy a present for your sister right?

Suddenly he raised his head to me:

"Say, Kousaka, how about each of us buy a half?"

"I don't want any."

"Oh…what if there is an actress that looks like Tamura-san?"

"I'm gonna kill you!"

I dragged him back to 1F. Damn it! How dare he suggest that! Are you kidding me?

Still, I told him beforehand:

"..I only have 2000 yen left.

I already felt tired just after a few minutes in this shop. In some way, I felt even more tired than I did at Summer Comiket.

Although at that time, everywhere there was eroge-related things, but here was much worse.

Next floor! We came across a male only shop, or sex-assist-for-male shop, but I didn't know how to describe it.

Ah…let's see…1F, B1 was small, but 2F was even smaller.

This was because this floor needed two places for the stairs to go up and down, and it also sold a lot of things. This floor also had more customers than below.

This was probably the main part of this shop.

I considered the 1F a "very small shop", but the 2F was the same. The only difference was in this case they contained erotic items! All of them! At least there were hundreds of them. I never thought there would be so much.

That's all. Please don't make me describe it anymore.

Just then, a stupid excited voice rang behind me:

"Look Kousaka! This is an Electric Vibrator Staff!"

Damn you Akagi! You wasted all of my effort to avoid this topic.

Sorry. Good readers please ignore everything he said!

"But damn… 17,000 yen? I couldn't buy it."

I wanted to ask him "Will you buy it if it were cheaper?"

Please god. Let him finish as quickly as possible so we could leave. If this continued, our conversation will become more and more perverted.

How could this happen just after nearly fifteen minutes? Did it always turn out this horrible when male students hang out together? Now that I think about it, when Kirino, Saori and Kuroneko….

Yeah, they could hang out together fine. Nothing like this could happen when I was with them.

But Akagi's little sister was an exception.

Yeah, no boys could compare with her perverseness.

"Hey Kousaka, what's with that look?"

"Hmm? Nothing nothing…er…I just think that there are so many things here."

I picked up a "Modeled after male's equipment", and said:

"Here, for example, can people really use this to do that?"

"A, ah..I'm not sure myself, but I heard a rumor on the internet that some producer even hired men for modeling. This is the end product."

"You don't have to explain it so clearly. Did you get money from them too?"

How the heck do you know so much about it? And so, we gradually made it to 5F.

There wasn't anything worth mentioning on the way, but to protect innocent readers, I won't describe it in detail. The only thing I could say is I found a "see-through-underwear."

When we made it to the female-related section, Akagi immediately went to the counter:

"Sorry, do you want to make a member card?"

"Yes please. Do you take member's orders here?"

What a skilled reply. I couldn't believe this was his first time here.

"Yes of course. Do you have any other questions?"

"Ah! By the way, can those points be exchanged for gifts?"

You still wanted to buy something else?

While Akagi was having a conversation with the person at the counter, I took a look around. Everywhere around me was SM toys, like whips and tight leather jackets.

Kuroneko or Ayase should suit them perfectly. And they had a tight leather jacket for males too, but of course you must have something to cover that thing on your lower body.

At that time, Akagi brought back a bag to me. He pointed to another direction:

"Hey Kousaka look! You can test those clothes over there!"

"!!!So what?"

"Nothing…Ha haha, I was joking."

"Get lost! You – I think you'll just get a nickname Homo Akagi."

"Ah…recently your criticism is so harsh."

Probably thanks to Makabe.

Both him and I constantly criticize someone else, so we were affected by each other.

"So, you got everything you need. Can we go home now?"

"Ah wait wait Kousaka. It's not like we can come here every day, how about we take a look. Only one floor left unexplored."

"You really like this place don't you?"

Fine. Whatever. I was used to being dragged by someone else.

We went to 6F.

To be honest, on the way there I already saw many, many erotic scenes, so I didn't expect anything else could startle me anymore.

But…when we were half way to 6F.

"Oh…oh…!"

As if I was struck by lightning.

How…how could this be…! How could something like this exist?

My whole body frozen in place, only my eyes were still working. I think everyone would react the same in their first time too.

"Hmhmhm…. So the final stage appeared…Kousaka..."

But Akagi showed a feral grin:

"Let's go! Let's go to the final floor!"

"Yeah!"

Thanks to my friend's courage, I managed to recover.

6F. Self-claimed "best sex toy shop in the world". Also sold the crystallization of human technology and erotic – human-size love dolls!!

"Oh look looklook! Look Kousaka! Look at this doll!"

"Wow!! Amazing! Amazingamazingamazing!"

We let out an excited cry, then both of us launched ourselves at the glass window.

"Hey Kousaka! This doll was placed so that it would greet us when we entered this floor, right?"

"Ah! I understand! So that's it!"

All of those dolls on this floor wore very attractive clothes. In fact, they were almost naked. And they were human-size!

On a closer look, I realized I could only find strings and connections in certain places…In the other places, from skin, the breast's shape, or cheek – everything else was perfect. Ah, a certain little friend of mine was getting excited.

We tried to regain control of our breathing and resumed conversation:

"Kousaka…you got that strange phenomenon just now?"

"You mean the more dolls look like humans, humans will develop feelings toward them. But then you realized that this is in fact something horrible?"

"Yeah…so…what do you think?"

"I had just lost control of myself, but …now that I think about it, it's strange. Japan's technology is so amazing. It's as if we are living in the future."

"Yeah…by the way, Kousaka, over there…"

"Hm…this doll…big breast…wearing glasses…where did I see this before…"

I turned around and looked directly into Akagi's eyes:

"Doesn't it look exactly like your little sister?"

"I'm gonna kill you!!!!"

He grabbed my collar and tried to pull it up. Damn, I couldn't breathe! God damn it! How could I be so careless, to say that to a siscon brother!

Suddenly, Akagi pushed me away, and roared:

"You! You…you…what exactly did you think about my little sister?"

"Sorry sorry! My mistake! But…isn't it really similar to her?"

"Shut up! This…this…this is impossible! This lifeless doll couldn't compare to my cute Sena -----"

"Oh damn! It really looks similar!"

"See? They really look similar!"

Akagi's face was firmly pressed against the glass, his eyes widened.

"What does this mean! How could they dare to make a doll after my sister?!"

"Probably just a coincidence! Calm down, will you!"

I understand your feelings.

If someday I discover a Kirino-look-alike doll, I won't be able to stay calm either.

"Phew…."

I took a deep breath, I tried to calm down.

Just how much do they sell them for anyway? I took a look at a nearby loli doll – which instantly made me want to cry…its price was no less than 100,000 yen…

How about that Sena-look-alike doll? Its price was 70,000 yen! You could buy a damn motorbike with that much money….

Ah….I didn't know that such a world exist…thank you for opening my eyes…

"Let…let's go back down Akagi…let's go home, right now…"

No response. I turned to him, only to find out that his face was in serious concentration.

"…70…70,000 yen."

"Return to yourself Akagi ----"

"..Ah! What? Huh? Kousaka?"

"Stop. Just stop. You were about to make a mistake!"

"You…you…what are you talking about?"

"Stop playing dumb! You damn pervert! You were about to spend the money for your motorbike in that Sena-look-alike doll, weren't you?"

"You…you..are you an idiot Kousaka? No way, there is no way I would do that."

Okay, if you say that, then I won't press it any further.

"Then that's fine. But I warned you! If you bought it…if someday your little sister found out about it…Your life would end. Immediately!"

If this were my house!! Hey hey, what am I thinking!! Damn damndamn! My mind automatically raced toward Kirino's image. Stop. Stop. Or else I'm dead!

Next to me, Akagi was trembling in anger. Having a cute beautiful little sister is hard, right Akagi?

"…Kay, I got it Kousaka. Of course I don't plan to buy it, but I have to buy a show catalog as the memorial for this time!"

This show catalog he mentioned contained a perfect copy of that Sena-look-alike love doll. Not only that, it also had skin material for the doll.

"…Whatever."

What else could I say?

And so, Akagi happily bought that catalog and put it together with his BL eroge bag.

That marked the end of our adventure in that dreaded shop. After that, we went to a nearby restaurant to eat something.

"Such a wonderful day! Right, Kousaka?"

"Yeah yeah…."

I knew how much you like that thing in your bag. But today was NOT a good day for me.

"Anyway, don't play innocent Kousaka. You even bought a DVD."

"Ah right…"

I looked beside me, where I placed my DVD box. I bought it with my money, so I wouldn't share it with him.

After he finished his Hamburger, Akagi said:

"Ha ha. I had planned to meet with little Sena later. After that we will go to the cinema, and then I will surprise her with these presents!"

I couldn't understand how he could call his little sister "little Sena". If I called mine "Kiririn", I would vomit on the spot, and Kirino would definitely throw a tantrum.

"Alright alright, I know that you siblings have a great relationship."

Unlike another pair of siblings.

A little sister with a strange hobby! And he always runs around helping her.

This part was actually like us a lot.

But after Akagi helps his sister with her unreasonable request, he always looks happy. Whether it was on that night at Akihabara or today.

I couldn't do that. How could I do that?

"Say, Akagi…"

"Hmm?"

"What is your little sister to you?"

"An angel."

An instant reply. And he looks satisfied.

"Angel?"

"How about you?"

"At the least I know that she is not my angel. If you asked me, even I don't know the answer myself."

If this was a year ago, I could answer immediately. But now, I couldn't.

I calmly replied to him.

What is my little sister to me? Even I don't know.

"I see…Ah…you had a quarrel with your little sister, didn't you?"

"Not exactly a quarrel…but did you hear my conversation with Manami?"

"Because I heard the topic about a little sister, so I tried to eavesdrop a little."

Akagi laughed it off.

I understand now. No wonder it feels so familiar! He is the same as Kirino. As soon as the topic is about 'little sisters', they will become more excited.

Although there was a difference between 2D and 3D, but Akagi and Kirino both are "Siscons". Akagi drank his remaining fruit juice and said:

"Strange. Suddenly, one day you get a little sister. Not because I asked someone for a little sister, she was just born."

"Yeah."

I nodded. As if Akagi recalled something, he smiled:

"Someday, my mom's belly suddenly got bigger and bigger, then someone told me 'Kouhei, you will become a brother'. At that time, I was just a kid, so I didn't understand it very much. So all I asked them was 'What are you saying? Didn't my mom just get fat?'. I worried for nothing. How about you?"

"Almost the same as you. Not long after that, my mom went into the hospital. Then my dad brought me to the hospital in a hurry."

Yes.

I remember it clearly.

The day Kirino was born! I will never, ever forget.

I hate her. I really hate her.

And yet…

That morning, the wind blew faster and harsher. And then it rained. After that, the dark clouds were blown away. In the parking lot, a small rainbow appeared. On an unknown flower, a single water droplet radiated brilliant light.

I'm unable to remember what I ate just three days ago.

But that morning … I remembered it clearly, as if it happened yesterday. Every time I close my eyes, I could easily recall it without any problem.

Kirino was placed in child-care, sleeping.

She was so petite! I was afraid because of how small she was.

"I recognized my little sister right after she was born. Although I didn't ask for a little sister, I was still very happy."

Akagi laughed.

"After she got home, she either cried or mom had to breast feed her, or lure her to sleep, or change her diaper,…in other words everyone needed to take care of her. I myself needed quite a long time to help change her diaper. You know, at that time, she didn't look that much different from a monkey, she wasn't cute at all. But whenever she cried, I would try my best to play with her."

"Looks like our family isn't that much different."

"I think so too. Your little sister is three years younger than you right? Not much different from us."

Akagi seemed embarrassed.

"Of course, there is nothing wrong with taking care of your little sister. It was just my habit. As long as you live together for a long time, you will get that big brother instinct."

"Instinct?"

"Yeah."

Akagi…he brought all of those BL-games that he bought earlier to the table.

"Yeah. For example, until now, if my little sister cries, I will take this and play with her, and make her smile again."

"You mean those toys?"

"Yes. Past experience showed me that at least she will stop crying."

"That example is…so extreme."

But deep down, I almost break into laughter. Because I understand.

I agree with him. As soon as a little sister is crying, it is her brother's job to make her stop. Sooner or later it will become a habit.

This is too late to change now.

Although to me, Kirino is not an angel!

But she is my little sister, she is the girl who I've taken care of since she was born.

Maybe that's enough for our relationship.

To me, no matter how long it takes! Years? Decades? Fine by me! This petite girl – before she leaves my side, no matter what happens I will protect her. Even if I hate her, that doesn't change this fact.

I tried to suppress my laughter, and said:

"Ah right, Akagi. I forgot to tell you."

"What?"

"Your angel is right behind you."

"What?"



Akagi paled, and turned around.

Sena Kouhei – Akagi's little sister was there, laughing.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Onii-chan."

"Se..Sena…since when do you get here?"

Akagi almost fell down from his chair. Blushing, Sena said:

"Since 'what is your little sister to you', 'an angel'."

"Wow!!!"

Too embarrassing, Akagi banged his head into the table.

"Ah~ so Onii-chan considers me his angel?"

Sena laughed at Akagi in a mocking tone. She sounded like a kid. Hey ~ did she always use that tone with her brother? So cute – I could guess Akagi's feeling.

"…Kousaka…you knew about Sena…but…"

"Ha ha ha."

If we exchanged places, you probably would do that too right?

"Please to meet you, Kousaka-senpai."

"Hi."

I waved at her. Sena took another look at us, then blushed and said:

"You two…are you two having a date?"

"Hey you fujoshi. Don't assume that we were on a date just because we went out together."

"Aha, what a good relationship you have."

Listen to me, you damn fujoshi.

"Hey Akagi! Say something to your sister!"

"Shut up! I want to kill myself now!"

"By the way, senpai, where did you two just go?"

"Hmm? We went to a sex shop to buy SM equipment and a meganekko DVD."

"Low tier."

Did Sena's glasses just flash?

"Yeah yeah. You are in no position to lecture me. Who asked her brother to buy homo eroge?"

"Ah, I almost forgot!"

Without an ounce of shame, Sena took all the eroges on the table:

"All of this belongs to a new author!! I have been waiting for this!"

Now you no longer had to hide your interest in front of me?

But that also meant you trusted me that much. So I was happy.

Taking the BL eroge bag in her hand, Sena smiled happily.

"Yea yea. Thank you, Onii-chan."

"No..nothing. Don't mention it."

Akagi blushed too. I hardly could believe this guy just wanted to commit suicide not too long ago.

"Ah, right…I got another present for you, well, a surprise present in fact."

"Really? ~ What could that be… my favorite Teddy bear?"

"Ha ha. This is a surprise. I will give it to you when we get home."

She only thanked you, and yet you looked like you could fly to heaven any moment.

…This 'Onii-chan' was helpless.

"Well, I will keep your secret this time."

I whispered, then stood up.

"Then I will be off."

"Bye. See you tomorrow, Kousaka-senpai."

"Tomorrow then, Kousaka."

"Yup. Don't you siblings need to go to the cinema? Go!"

I said goodbye to those good siblings, and went to the front door.

When I was half way there…

"Onii-chan…what is this here?"

"Ah!"

"What ..is that…Love doll …big breast meganekko. What is a love doll? Is that your surprise present for me?"

I started to doubt if my classmate could make it to school tomorrow…

I think that only god knows the answer.


第三話

Chapter 3

That day, we were planning to go to a small café to celebrate Kirino's return to Japan. It had been a long time since Kirino, Kuroneko, Saori and I have met together.

Saori Bajeena, a person always dressed in distinct otaku fashion bundled with her swirly-eyed glasses, who is also very tall.

She is a friend of both mine and Kirino's, but also the leader of a SNS community group called "Otaku Girls Unite!". She's very familiar with the Akihabara region, and recommended us multiple store locations.

But on the day of the party, I suddenly received a call from Saori in the morning.

She had sudden, unexpected businesses to attend to, and so she could not come to the party.

"I'm very sorry, Kyousuke-shi. This is quite an important matter and I certainly cannot avoid this one. If possible try to enjoy the party without me."

"N-no, we can always move the party to a later date. We'll just hang out at my place, I guess."

There is no point to this party if you can't attend it! Kirino and Kuroneko probably would've thought the same way.

"Is that so… Well then, I'll try to make a visit as soon as everything is taken care of. I might be very late though."

"No, don't worry about it, just do what you need to do."

"It's okay, I'll definitely make a visit!"

Whoa, why is this person shouting all of a sudden? Well, anyways…

"Really? Then we'll be waiting."

"Alright. Please pass the message to Kirino-shi and Kuroneko-shi. I'll also be bringing presents. Now then..!"

"O-oi… ah she hung up."

I was about to say that she didn't need to bring presents, but honestly, this person cares too much about us. Of course I'm still very thankful, and she has been a lot of help. But…I hoped she would be more natural and comfortable around us.

Because she is our friend.

****

Due to the party being cancelled, us three decided to stay at the Kousaka resident. Me, Kirino, Kuroneko; it's the first time us three had stayed here since the "Meruru appreciation event".

"So come to our place right now, I'll show you my collection. I was planning to show you before when we were watching Meruru, but I couldn't because we were fighting over your dumb doujinshi!"

Kirino was talking on the phone with Kuroneko. To my knowledge, they were both at fault for making each other angry…

And so, after an hour, Kuroneko arrived.

"…Hi."

"Yo, good to see you here."

I walked out to the front door to greet her as usual.

Today, Kuroneko was wearing her gothic lolita costume, instead of her school uniform which I had gotten so used to.

I felt nostalgic thinking how everything seemed to be back to the way it was before Kirino left to study in America.

Seems like Kuroneko was giving me an attitude lately though…

"You can come in."

"Pardon my intrusion." [9]

Kuroneko placed her shoes very neatly on the floor. I became familiar with this sight ever since she started coming over to work on our computer game.

I took her up to my sister's room.

Kirino was waiting for us on the second floor, with her arms crossed.

"Che, you're late."

She was leaning on the wall and looking down at us. Even though my sister talked this way, she was probably extremely happy to see her friend. I noticed that she was struggling not to smile.

"Well… come in."

Kirino lifted her chin in the direction of her room, and invited Kuroneko.

"Alright, I'll do that."

After replying in a blunt, straightforward manner, Kuroneko passed me and Kirino and--

"?!?!"

—instead of Kirino's, she walked into my room like it was the most natural thing to do.

"O-oi!!"

Surprised, Kirino's eyes were wide open. She pushed herself off the wall, and gave me a strong glare.

"HEY, YOU! WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON?!"

Shouting at me like that won't help explain anything… But I followed Kuroneko into my room while nervously scratching my cheeks. Kirino followed suit.

"Hey… Kuroneko?"

"What is it?"

Kuroneko looked back with a dumbfounded expression.

I felt a cold stare on my back, and all the hair on my body stood on end. Must be the death approaching.

"Ah…the thing is… t-today, we were planning to play in Kirino's room, weren't we?"

"What? 'Today'? What do you mean by that?"

The whisper coming from my back was extremely frightening.

But Kuroneko only laughed and decided to make the situation worse.

"Oh, right! I've been too used to coming into this room that I made a mistake!"

Pow! After hearing this, Kirino's reaction was to kick her brother's butt.

"Ow, that hurts!"

"Shut up!"

After kicking me away from the entrance, she barged into my room. Then she grabbed my shirt and pushed me against the wall.

"…Ugh…"

There was a short silence, then she spoke in a threatening voice.

"Why don't you explain yourself. What's wrong with you? Did you really hit on your little sister's friend while I was gone? If so, I'll never forgive you."

W-what??? She totally has the wrong idea! …Do something Kuroneko!

With teary eyes, I tried to make eye contact with Kuroneko. But she was smiling at us like she was enjoying all this.

She started twiddling her hair with her fingers, and gave us a mysterious look.

"…About that…, fufu…, 'Kyou'? Should we explain our relationship to 'Kirino-san'?"

"Stop talking like we have an intimate relationship!"

'Kirino-san', 'Kyou'. You, how come you're pretending we're very close in front of Kirino, but act cold whenever only two of us are talking?!

"'Kyou…', disgusting."

I could see veins popping out on Kirino's forehead. She seemed to truly dislike what Kuroneko had said, but it's not the first time seeing her act this way.

Yes, she was also like this when my childhood friend came over.

"Oh my. 'Kirino-san' seems angry. What should we do, 'Kyou'?"

"…I noticed just now, but are you trying to imitate Manami?"

"Fufu, is it similar?"

"NOT AT ALL!"

How could someone talk with such a mischievous voice?

"Geez…your personality is really…"

"…Thanks. I'm happy to hear that, 'Kyou'."

"Ugh.."

Dammit, I wasn't trying to compliment her. She's laughing in such a coquettish manner…I can feel my face growing hot.

Noticing this, Kuroneko put on a smile and continued her attack.

"What's wrong? Your face has gotten all red."

"……"

Women are creatures I'll never understand. From her reactions, one would easily think, "Yes! She's totally into me!"

But once you actually take the approach, she would coldly turn you away.

While I was wracking my brain, Kirino gave me a cold stare and said in a sharp voice,

"Explain. Now."

"No, Kirino… It's not what you think…"

I attempted to explain the situation while half-crying.

I told her that Kuroneko and Saori frequently came to visit while she was gone. Thankfully, she seemed satisfied with it, and the misunderstanding between me and Kuroneko was gone. However…

"You…you really brought two female high school students into your room to play while I was gone? You pervert."

She seemed to be dissatisfied with something else now…

Kirino turned her hands into tight fists, and her voice and body started shaking.

"Y-you've got it wrong again! They came to visit because they thought I would be lonely without you!"

"Hm…"

"That's why they came over so often! It doesn't make sense for you to be angry at this, right?"

"Well…I guess…"

Sigh... I seem to have succeeded in calming her down. Or so I thought…

"But! Even though I understand…!"

"What is it this time?!"

"That! What the hell's up with that?!?"

Kirino was pointing at my bed.

"Haa… have you stopped fighting yet? *Yawn* I'm beginning to get sleepy…"

Lying down, Kuroneko was reading a manga. Her eyes were droopy, and she seemed very relaxed.

"…Getting sleepy? HEY!"

Kirino gave her precious otaku friend a 'flying drop kick'.

Kuroneko cried out in pain. Kirino seemed she had really meant to hurt her…

Deciding that she couldn't take it, Kuroneko got up and snapped at Kirino,

"W-what do you think you're doing… Get the hell off me!"

"Why don't YOU get off the bed!"

Kirino and Kuroneko had started a fight on someone else's bed.

"Y-you, how can you lie down on someone else's bed like it's the most natural thing in the world??"

"It's not even your bed, why would you be so angry?"

"What? B-because…"

"Fu, because?"

"S-SHUT UP! Since I'm home we can all go play in MY room! But you guys are making me so angry!"

It was like watching two street cats fight. Their clothes were becoming messy and tangled.

But it came down to this,

'Since I'm home, we can all go play in MY room!'

If I put myself in Kirino's shoes, after seeing that her friend and her brother had gotten so close, she must've been feeling left out. That's why she didn't like all this.

Kuroneko probably knew this too. Right now, she was wrestling with Kirino with a devilish smile on her face.

"Kukuku… how foolish. Do you really think a mere human like you can beat me in a close-range battle?"

"S-stop tickling me! That's so cheap…! Kyaa! Seriously, stop..!!"

Meanwhile, Kirino was venting out her anger with her face completely red, and her eyes like this >.<

To end the stalemate of constantly pushing on each other with their hands, they had started kicking and tickling each other. Their skirts had flipped up, which exposed the upper parts of their legs. It felt awkward, and I didn't know where to look.

It's not because of this, but I didn't feel like trying to stop them. Even though they were insulting each other, it was probably a unique part of their communication.

While being furious with each other, there still seemed to be a happy, friendly atmosphere throughout.

… Although my bed was completely ruined.

****

After the two had calmed down, we went to Kirino's room as planned.

This was because Kirino wanted to show off her collection. I'm talking about all the weird stuff I saw when she first came to me for life counseling. 18+ materials and all, in the secret compartment of her room. She must really trust Kuroneko.

"No way… I never knew you owned this much 'dark matter' …" [10]

I couldn't understand very well, but she was engrossed in the "Scatology Sisters" package. [11]

"W-well~! I just bought it because I love the illustration!"

And here, Kirino was trying to explain herself the same way she did to me.

"……"

While the two were chatting away, I was looking at Kirino's hidden 'secret box'. I remember regretting how I should've taken a look inside when Kirino was studying in America.

Back then, I was scared that some dark matter along the lines of scatology would appear from it. But as time passed, I gradually calmed down. And since Kuroneko's here… maybe it's alright if I take a look.

"Hey Kirino, what's in that album of yours in your box?"

"Huh?"

She looked back with a strange expression as if I had poked her tongue.

"Like, because… you were going to show it to me before, right? I said I would take a look later."

And my sister's reply was:

"I decided I'm never gonna show it to you."

"…Alright."

Life seemed like an ero game but without a save file.

Once you make a decision, you can't move backwards in time and make another.

****

For hours, we chatted away about Kirino's collection. No wait, that's probably an exaggeration. It was just a repeated process of Kirino shyly handing a part of her collection to Kuroneko, and Kuroneko making a reaction.

"H-how does it make sense that I'm at a friend's house, listening to someone proudly showing off her incest ero game collection… Maybe I should be beat you up and escape before anything dangerous happens…?"

"No no no, you've got it all wrong! S-sometimes I just want someone to call me her sister!"

Basically Kuroneko was showing negative reactions to much of her collection.

I understand how she feels though. If I ever went over to Akagi's house and he started showing me homosexually themed games, I would definitely punch him.

Anyways, after, we went down to the living room, and the three of us started watching anime.

Maybe this was a possible continuation of the "Meruru appreciation event", which had ended on the wrong foot.

We watched the new, third season of Meruru, and Kirino excitedly told us everything about it.

Time flew by, and it was in the evening when Saori finally showed up.

"Hey everyone, sorry I'm so late~."

We all went to the front door to greet the tall lady with swirly-eyed glasses, who was scratching her cheeks, which were now red.

"You had stuff to take care of right? Then it's no problem."

"Haha, thank you. The way you put it makes me happy. Ah, here's some Meruru cookies, let's all eat some together."

With that, she handed us a small bag.

"T-thanks… Heh, I never knew these existed…"

Kirino accepted her bag. But even though she had received something from her favorite anime, she suddenly made a frown.

"But… isn't your house very far from here?"

"Yes, it is."

"Yeah, then you didn't really need to force yourself to come after finishing up. Since it's getting pretty late already, we won't be able to play much more. That cat was about to go home too… Ah, but of course I'm still happy that you came."

"No need for words like that. Kiririn-shi, I…"

Saori had stopped talking. She looked at Kirino straight in the eyes.

"I wanted to meet Kiririn-shi today no matter how busy I was."

"Um… why?"

Kirino seemed taken aback by her serious tone.

Saori continued to speak:

"What do you mean… it's been three months! I actually wanted to meet you sooner, but I've been very busy lately… I always seem to have something to take care of whenever Kiririn-shi and Kuroneko-shi have free time, and Kyousuke-shi has his entrance exam, right? If I missed my chance today, I don't know when we would all be able to meet again."

And that's why she pushed herself to visit our place.

To think about it, this is the first time for them meeting each other since Kirino's return.

"I couldn't even go to the airport to greet you… how rude of me. I'm so sorry."

"N-no, not at all! I don't mind, a-are you stupid? I should be the one apologizing!"

While avoiding Saori's gaze, Kirino said something that made me think she was very mature.

"…I'm sorry! I'm sorry that I left you all without saying anything!"

I'm included in that 'all' too, right?

A smile returned to Saori's face. She had accepted Kirino's apology.

But her voice was weaker than usual, and didn't have the energy.

Kuroneko, one the other hand, went on to show her usual attitude.

"Hmph, do you really think this will be over with a single apology? You brown-haired bitch."

"What?! No, that's not it!"

You didn't even think much about us when you were gone, isn't that right?

And of course, she, yet again, falls into Kuroneko's trap. She's so hopeless.

"Fufu… really? Is that so?"

"I'm telling you the truth! Why are you doubting me?!"

"Oh, really? Then do you like me?"

"H-hey, what?? What are you-!"

"Ah, I guess she hates me. What a pity… Saori? Senpai? I guess she doesn't consider the likes of us as friends, isn't that sad?"

Man, Kuroneko is such a mean person. Stop toying around with my sister so much, you.

But, I'll make an exception since it sounds interesting. I exchanged glances with Saori, and nodded.

"…Yup, what an inconsiderate sister. As her brother, I don't know what I can say to the two of you, when you guys were so lonely that she was gone…"

"Kiririn-shi… did you not feel lonely at all?"

"Y-you guys too?? If you don't stop now I'm really gonna get angry!"

"Hahaha. Oh, how fun."

Kuroneko seems to be most happy when she's teasing Kirino. Her cheeks are dyed red, and her eyes would flash brightly. Watching them bicker is probably the best form of entertainment.

"Ahaha, haha- You guys haven't changed a bit!"

Saori finally broke into laughter with a large smile on her face.

"…I'm glad."

Two days passed, and it was after school.

"Manami, let's go home."

"Ah, sorry Kyou-chan… I have something to do today."

"Huh? Again… What's up? You seem busy lately."

"…It's because of Kyou-chan…"

"?"

What's she talking about?

I was forced to walk home by myself after being turned down by Manami. I changed my shoes and headed outside. Alone, I started walking when I suddenly heard someone call out to me in a quiet voice.

"…Hey."

"Hm? Ah, Kuroneko."

I looked back and saw her.

"I saw you walking alone… that's why I decided to come here." [12]

"Alright, let's walk together then."

"…Okay."

And with that, she slightly nodded her head. It was a minor gesture, yet strangely she looked really cute.

I wonder if there's anyone who can understand my feelings right now.

Ugh... dammit. Even though I had talked to her in my usual carefree manner.

It's just the two of us! What should I do! I feel nervous…

"… … … … … …"

Even though Kuroneko had approached me, she wouldn't say anything…

I guessed this would be the perfect chance to ask her about that kiss.

"Hey…"

"…W-what is it?"

"…Nothing…"

"…Okay."

Sorry, it's harder than I thought. I can't possibly ask her…it would be embarrassing if everything was just my imagination.

And so we continued walking in silence. But it wasn't long before I came up with something to talk about.

I was going to ask her about it sooner or later anyway, and there's nothing unnatural about this subject to both of us.

"Hey Kuroneko, about Saori…"

"Hm?"

"Well, she looked kind of down the other day; I was wondering if we can do anything about it."

"Oh, that…"

"What do you mean 'that'? And with that blunt tone… isn't she your friend?"

"…Fu...no, I was actually talking about that with your sister last night."

"Oh, actually…?"

"Really, you guys are the same."

"Shut up. ...So? Did you guys come up with something?"

"I'll tell you. …But it's probably similar to what you're already thinking."

"Alright."

Kirino and Kuroneko. I guess the way they thought was exactly the same.

Well, of course.

Because we're dealing with a precious friend here.

****

On the next weekend [13], we decided to venture outside our usual "area" where we hang out.

It was a hot day. As soon as I stepped out from the shade, intense sunlight pierced my eyes. It felt good on my skin though. In front of the station, various stores stretched far and wide. They gave off a refreshing atmosphere.

We turned around a corner and came across a street that was heavily sloped towards the sky.

I took another look at my map and spoke up.

"According to the map, we have to go this way."

"We have to climb this hill?" said Kirino, reluctantly.

"Well this is depressing."

A sigh was heard from the girl dressed in goth lolita clothing. I've been wondering about this since a long time ago, but how could you bear wearing such thick clothes in the middle of summer? She claims that she put a thin layer of energy around her to keep the heat out, but of course that's just nonsense.

But I couldn't simply tell her to take her clothes off, so I just decided to check up on her frequently.

"Tell me if you ever get tired, let's take it easy."

"Oh? How kind of you, 'senpai'."

"That's what a senpai should be like."

I gave a confident reply back. Kuroneko blinked a few times then turned away from me.

However, my sister seemed really pissed. She crossed her arms and snapped at me.

"You. You don't have anything to say to me?"

"But you're wearing light clothing."

Today, Kirino wore shorts that revealed her thighs almost completely. I found it hard to find a place to put my eyes on. Along with Kuroneko's attire, we started to gain more and more attention.

Well, I've gotten used to that from walking around with them so often anyway.

"And I know you're strong enough to manage this walk easily."

"Well, that's true."

Looking proud, Kirino tapped the ground with the tip of her foot a few times. I was glad that she seemed more relaxed, but...

"You, go buy us some drinks from a vending machine."

That's what she told me to do.

"Water or tea in PET bottles." [14]

"Yeah, yeah."

I obediently headed towards a vending machine.

We continued walking on the sloped road. It was almost completely filled with houses, and even convenience stores weren't in sight. Some other buildings other than houses included a school, a post office…, stuff like that.

I have to say, the buildings here looked luxurious, but I complained about how there weren't enough places to satisfy the needs for everyday commodities.

"…Look at how big these houses are."

"…I imagined something like this from the address, but.."

"That swirly eyes actually live in one of the places like this?"

Kirino muttered in an unconvinced voice after we had just passed by a place that looked like a castle.

Of course by 'swirly eyes', we're talking about Saori…

I guess I'll tell you what's going on.

Yes, we're heading to Saori's place. We decided to buy some presents that she would enjoy and pay her a visit to cheer her up, because she looked pretty depressed the last time we saw her.

It's become my habit to rely on presents whenever something goes wrong. I wouldn't say it's anything wrong though, I'm sure Kirino and Kuroneko will agree with me.

Anyway, we found her address from the old package she had previously sent to Kirino that contained Meruru doujinshi. The 'Sender' section seemed to include her real name and address, so.

I thought about giving her a call before we head there, but Kirino and Kuroneko insisted that it would be more fun to give a sudden visit.

Well to be honest I thought it'd be more interesting that way too because…

'Haha, this is embarrassing. It's actually my first time hosting an offline meeting, and I had made up this character so everyone would like me and see me as a proper leader. …But usually I'm a bit less outgoing, you know?'

Maybe we would be able to see…

Saori without her otaku clothing; her 'true' identity.

****

After walking for a few more minutes, we finally arrived at our destination.

It was a three-story mansion. It didn't look as luxurious compared to the other buildings we've passed on the way, but the white building still looked well-polished.

There was a small breeze and the scent of water reached my nose.

The sea was probably nearby.

"Here we are."

"This is where Saori lives?"

"I think so."

I replied to Kirino's question with a bit of uncertainty. I personally couldn't believe that Saori lived in such a beautiful place. I mean, I truly can't imagine her walking around this neighbourhood in her otaku clothing!

"Well, let's go in then."

Kuroneko insisted. It was evident that she wanted me to go in first.

"Y-yeah."

At the entrance, I noticed a black pad shaped like a Monolith beside the automatic doors. [15]

It was an intercom with a number pad.

This probably meant we couldn't enter the building without a resident's permission.

"What do we do?"

"What do you mean… just enter her suite number and ask her to open the door for us. That's the only thing we can do."

"…Hmph. If she lived in an apartment or a regular house, we could've surprised her at the door… Who knew that that otaku woman's place would have such an advanced security system…"

"Hey, can't you use your 'dark powers' to open the door or something?"

Kirino suddenly got a little irritated and started making a fool out of Kuroneko.

"…Fu. I can't easily use my powers in such a public place, you know."

"Yeah, yeah. I'm sure that's the case."

As Saori had always said, their bickering started to look more and more like signs of friendship.

"What are you doing? Hurry up and enter the number."

At my sister's request, I started to reach for the number pad, but stopped.

"Ah."

"Why? What's wrong?"

"I don't know the number."

"What???"

"No, you see, it wasn't listed on the package. It just had the address, but not the suite number."

"Really? Then we'll never find out where she lives… are you really that dumb?"

"I can't believe you realized it just now…senpai is really stupid."

"Y-you guys! Don't just blame everything on me!"

Faced with a sudden problem, we panicked and started arguing with each other.

The sight of a meek, male high school student, a female student dressed up in Goth Lolita clothing, and another female student with highly exposed thighs making a ruckus is probably enough to make anyone suspicious.

But suddenly…

"WHAT ARE YOU GUYS UP TO!"

Someone bellowed in a threatening voice behind us.

"Whoa!"

My body automatically contracted from the loud voice. I cautiously looked back, and…

"W-what the hell's happening?!"

There was a military officer standing there, clad in armour and various gears. The face was completely hidden with a pair of sunglasses and a helmet.

He-, or judging by the voice, she, held an assault rifle. The barrel, which shone brightly, was pointed straight at us.

"Freeze!!"

"AHHHHHH!!"

It must've taken less than a fraction of a second to raise our hands above our heads.

The perpetrator slowly pushed the rifle up along her shoulders, and turned the barrel to aim at Kirino.

"I'll blow that pretty face off!"

"Kyaa!"

With Kirino completely frozen in her spot, I instinctively jumped forward and stood in front of my sister.

"STOP!"

But as time passed the bullets never came, and-

"W-what…"

-only a heavy silence was draped over us.

"Pff-"

The soldier suddenly started laughing.

"AHA, HAHAHAHAHA!"

"…Huh?"

We were completely flabbergasted. [16] The soldier started firing towards the sky.

Rat-a-tat-tat-tat-, a loud noise and BB gun bullets filled the air.

"I was just joking around."

The soldier took the helmet off and put on a smile.

"Sorry to scare you guys."

She was beautiful. She had long, silky hair, and her sunglasses fit her very well. She was surprisingly taller than me, and gave off an assertive, confident aura. I would be fooled completely if she called herself a veteran soldier.

"…Ah, yeah…"

I still couldn't understand what was happening.

"W-what the heck…"

I heard Kirino sigh from behind me, clearly relieved. And--

"Heh, I knew that gun was a fake all along. What an interesting act."

Liar! I clearly saw Kuroneko's face back then. She had looked completely terrified and her eyes had been filled with tears.

"Well I'm happy I was able to witness such heartwarming love between siblings, thanks!"

"…!"

I just realized I was standing in front of my sister with my arms stretched out to protect her. Dammit, this is embarrassing…

No, but really. It's perfectly reasonable to lose your sense of judgement when there's someone pointing a gun at you.

A threw a question at her as I continued to recover from the shock.

"…Um, so…who are you? Do you live in this mansion or something?"

"Hm? Well, yeah. I honestly thought you guys were suspicious, so."

"You look even more suspicious in a lot of ways."

This is something anyone would agree with.

"Fu. I was enjoying a survival game by myself, but I noticed a weird trio fighting in front of our mansion so I decided to joke around a bit."

"Hmm, you don't have any friends?"

Unbelievable. You aren't supposed to ask those kind of personal questions, Kirino!

But then, why would someone play a survival game all by herself…

Why was this woman playing such a lonesome game in the middle of the afternoon on a free day?

"Haha, thanks for pointing that out."

Instead of acting offended, she started laughing. Who really is this person? Looks kinda similar to someone I know…

"Alright, I'll admit that all of us look weird. But mind if I ask what brings you guys here?"

"Ah well-"

I looked back at Kirino and Kuroneko. They both nodded their heads.

They were asking me to explain. Yeah, yeah, I understand.

"You see, a close friend of ours lives here-"

After explaining that we planned to surprise our friend with a sudden visit, we received an unexpected reply.

"Is that so… Is your name Kyousuke by any chance?"

"Y-yes?"

"Then that goth lolita girl is Kuroneko-shi, and the girl with pretty brown hair is Kiririn-shi?"

"You know us?"

Kirino, who was intently listening in, couldn't seem to believe her ears. The armour clad woman made a face like this ■ω■ (because she's wearing sunglasses), and continued talking.

"Of course, I heard about you guys from my little sister."

"L-little sister?"

Kuroneko asked again for confirmation.

"I don't believe this-"

The stranger gave a sly laugh, and revealed her name.

"Pardon my late introduction. My name is Kaori Makishima. Your friend 'Saori' is my little sister."

"W-WHAT…!!"

Kirino and I cried out at the same time. I thought Kuroneko's eyes were about to pop out any second.

"Y-you're Saori's older sister?!"

"Sure am. Thanks for taking care of my sister."

Kaori slowly nodded her head.

Now that I was able to think clearly, I could definitely notice a lot of similarities between her and Saori. They were both very tall, and had similar facial and body features. However, she gave off a different aura compared to Saori.

"Fu, what is it Kyousuke-shi? Staring at me so closely like that. –Aha, you must have been mesmerized by my beauty."

"You're definitely Saori's sister!"

They even spoke in such a similar manner. Well, at least I could tell she was hiding a very good-looking face behind her sunglasses. Kuroneko agreed with me.

"Yeah…the way you confidently wear such weird clothing does remind me of your sister."

It was a little surprising that Kuroneko was calmly able to insult a stranger.

Kirino also crossed her arms and muttered,

"You totally look like an otaku."

"Wow, you guys sure are rude as usual!"

"Hahaha, don't worry too much Kyousuke-shi, I'm used to these types of insults. It's because the friends I usually hang around with have very foul mouths."

After saying that, she took a look at Kirino and Kuroneko. They had a confused expression on their faces.

I smiled bitterly.

"There's more people like these? I don't really buy that. Well, basically you're saying that it's alright for us to insult you?"

"Yes."

While lifting a corner of her mouth, she nodded happily.

This reminded me of 'that' time, when we had all first met.

It was a weird feeling. She seemed quite different from Saori, but it felt so much like talking to a close friend.

"Anyways, thanks for coming a long way for the visit, but Saori isn't home right now. She's got some stuff to take care of at school."

"School? But it's a holiday."

"Yes. Didn't you see it on the way here? She goes to that school. I'm a student full of youth who attends a university near here." [17]

"…Please don't call yourself that."

"Heh…"

"What is it?"

I shrugged as I watched Kaori tilt her head to the side.

"Nothing. I just think that unlike Saori, you must be older than me. Are you a university student?"

I took another look and nodded at Kaori.

"I believe you. You do look like a university student."

"Ho, hooo~"

Kaori's veins started to throb. For some reason that I can't explain, she really got pissed off at me.

Soon enough, I found the assault rifle pointed at my forehead.

"Eh-?"

Not even giving me enough time to question her actions,

Rat-a-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-tat! The gun fired.

"Ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow?!"

"Oops, my hand slipped."

****

A few minutes later, we followed Kaori onto the second floor of her mansion.

"My sister will get mad at me if I don't serve you guys at least a cup of tea for coming all the way here."

With that, she invited us in. To be honest, I wanted to learn more about the 'real' Saori, like what kind of house she lived in. That's why I decided to gladly accept it. Kirino and Kuroneko probably felt the same way.

"Hm… do only two of you live together?"

"Yeah, we're living separated from our parents because of the schools we go to."

Kuroneko and Saori started conversing in informal language. [18] The reason a shy person like Kuroneko was able to comfortably talk to Kaori was probably because she sensed a strong familiarity.

We were walking down a hallway without a speck of dust in sight when Kirino spoke up,

"There aren't any doorplates for all the rooms in this mansion.."

"Which one is yours?"

As I asked, Kaori turned around to answer.

"Mm? My parents own the entire mansion and we're using it. So…"

"So all of them?!"

"Yeah, exactly."

Very impressive.

"Hm, then you must be able to put up a lot of displays for your collection. Sounds kind of tough to clean all of them though."

Kirino added. Kaori nodded at her.

"Fufu, you catch on quick, Kiririn-shi. Like you've said, this mansion is a proud gallery of mine. It's a good opportunity to see it, so come on in!"

As she puffed out her large chest, she invited us in.

And what we saw was –

"Wow…" "…Whoa." "Wha – !!!!"

We were in a very large room. I guess it was a one-room design—nah, can't be since there weren't any kitchens. But anyways, it was huge for a single room. I wondered how big it was exactly.

It seemed like the room was made to use it 'this way'.

There were tall glass displays lined up against the walls and in the center of the room. They contained countless robot plastic models [19] figures, and various DVDs and novels.

The ceiling had various spaceship models made out of metal wiring attached to it. It seemed like the entire room was a space colony or some sort.

And the hallway leading to the room had many stacks of plastic model boxes.

It was quite overwhelming for an amateur like me. So… both of them are otakus…

"…Man, going to the washroom is gonna be tough."

"What kind of room is this?! It's AMAZING- !!!"

"Hahaha, it really is, isn't it!"

Kaori nodded at the sight of Kirino complimenting her collection with lit-up eyes. She looked very satisfied.

She really seemed happy. I've seen something like this before-

In my sister's room of course.

Being able to show off their most prized collection…

It's probably the best moment of any otaku's life.

"I was inspired to design it this way from a book that featured this otaku room in a foreign country. I can't lose to those people just putting stuff in a gigantic room just because they have some space left at home! I'm not even jealous! The size doesn't matter! The concept is what's truly important! I'll show them that the size of the gallery has nothing to do with the amount of effort that was put into it!"

Ugh, you're too loud. Aren't you getting a little bit too excited?

While Kaori was giving her fired up speech, Kirino was looking at the collection with such awe.

"Ah, this is the Red Comet Helmet!"

"…These sunglasses look the same as the ones Quattro Bajeena wore." [20]

Kuroneko was bent over with a blank expression on her face. She was poking one of the glass displays with her finger.

"By the way, the ones I'm wearing right now are the same too."

"Eeh…" [21]

Kuroneko spoke in a nonchalant tone.

"You said these are 'your collections', so is it not mixed with Saori's stuff? I thought her nickname originated from here…"

"Hm? N-no. Of course it's mixed! Yep, I guess I didn't say it clearly. This is 'our collection'."

"…Fu, is that so."

Kuroneko's leery smile was reflecting off the glass panels.

Kirino cut in like she suddenly remembered something.

"Ah, the presents, before we forget."

"Oh yeah."

I agreed and took out the three presents from my bag.

"Presents?"

Kaori tilted her head questioningly.

"Yeah, these are for Saori."

"Well, I'll say thanks in place of Saori. But do you have a specific reason for these? It's not her birthday, or any special day for that matter."

"Gosh, are we not allowed to bring presents without a reason?"

"We had received Meruru cookies before. No, since we're visiting a friend's place for the first time we thought it'd be reasonable to bring them."

"Yeah. I recently got a computer from her too. We rely on her a lot for many things, and she's our friend. You should also take a look; you know a lot of about plastic models too, right?"

As I handed her an HG 1/144 'Susanou' box [22], which was my present, Kaori showed an exceptionally positive reaction.

"Ho~, this is!"

"By the way, this isn't yours, just to make sure you know."

"Of course I know that! I'll make sure to pass it to her. But this, Kyousuke-shi~, it's a very fitting choice of a present for Saori."

"Well, Saori likes to build these models a lot so…I thought she'd enjoy it. We all went to buy it together. I wasn't really sure which one to buy, but this one seemed pretty cool to me… do you think Saori will be happy with this?"

"—Of course, without a doubt she'll like it. You can bet on it."

"…Really? That's a relief."

Kuroneko revealed her present next.

"'Death Size', eh? As expected of Kuroneko-shi!" [23]

And lastly--

"I'll say it in advance, but compared to mine, these other two are a joke. This is a 'real' present."

"Ooh, I'm excited."

Kaori smiled.

"You should be—, here."

Kirino grinned and confidently held out her box.

"Tada! Kugimiya Rie rode this in 'Mobile Suit Gundam 00'! Isn't it great?!"

"That's for Nena, not Kugimiya Rie!"

Kaori cried in a fierce voice without any sort of hesitation. I wasn't sure why but I guess this wasn't something she took lightly.

"W-why are you angry?"

"I'm saying that you shouldn't get confused with a voice actor and the character itself. You can't get the names of the pilots and the vehicles wrong. Love, there's not enough love!"

"So what if I call it Kugimiya gundam..."

"Kugimiya gundam?! Ah, my soul is being sucked out by Earth's gravity…" [24]

"No, you don't need to get that frustrated…"

Even if you say that Kirino, you can't speak in place of another person. Kaori's reaction is exactly the same as when Kuroneko insulted your favorite anime, Meruru.

Otakus tend to have such unique ideas and beliefs that another person would think that they're something trivial. That's what I learned in a year's experience.

"But just open it, it's really cute!"

"Hm? It's not a regular model?"

With a serious look, Kaori took the box from Kirino and opened it.

And then,

"Ah…?! T-this is…"

Kaori was at a loss for words.

"Isn't it awesome? How is it? How is it?"

"No…, w-wait a sec…"

Kirino was confidently walking towards her, but Kaori blocked her with her hand, clearly irritated.

"How should I put it…, first…, um…, why did you build the actual model?!"

"Huh? I'm not supposed to do that?"

"Kiririn-shi… I'm gonna tell you once so listen up. The models, even though putting them on the display is enjoyable, building the model itself is where the real fun is at! If you give me the finished product, I can't get the maximum enjoyment out of the model!"

"Ugh, you're so bothersome. All modellers are annoying!"

I had to agree. As expected, an otaku's way of thinking is completely over the head for casuals. Kaori probably wouldn't want to hear that from me though.

"Ah…I can't believe you did this… unbelievable."

Kaori started muttering while holding Kirino's finished model.

"I don't like the fact that you simply used a nipper to cut the parts off. You didn't sand any of the parts, you didn't do any tentative assemblies—you can't consider this as a real model."

"…I had a lot of extra parts left by the way."

"That's even more unacceptable!"

'Hah… Hah…' Kaori's shoulders were visibly moving up and down while breathing heavily. But Kirino was surprisingly calm.

"By the way, unlike Saori, her sister gets mad pretty easily."

"Ugh…, S-Saori will definitely do the same!"

"Oh really?"

"Of course! Even we assume that I can forgive you for pre-assembling it…"

I could see her veins popping out from her temples.

"WHAT ARE THESE SPARKLY THINGS ALL OVER IT?!"

"Oh, that? Eheheh. I tried decorating the gundam. Isn't it really cute?!"

"You…decorated it…?"

Kaori covered her face while swaying weakly from side to side. Let me explain. Tons of sparkling jewelry covered the model that Kirino had put together. You know, the types that middle-schoolers would like.

"Uh, K-Kaori…, are you alright?"

"Sorry… Kyousuke-shi. Something… inconceivable just happened and…"

"Just rest for a bit on this chair… here…"

When I held her by the arms to support her, she slowly staggered over and sat on the seat that looked like where a captain of a spaceship would sit in. Then, she completely went limp.

"Huh? What's wrong?"

What are you standing around like an idiot for?! What kind of sick joke is this for a gundam otaku!

Kuroneko whispered in my ear.

"…The mood is terrible. Try doing something about it."

"…I know."

I frantically looked around and started talking while facing Kaori.

"B-by the way, there sure are a lot of models! With this much, taking care of all of them would be quite a chore!"

"Y-yeah. But I don't mind at all. Checking on my collection, Kyousuke-shi, is what makes me the happiest."

"Really?"

"Of course!"

Ah, so it was like that. I had nothing to say after she had replied with such certainty.

"Then sorry if it's too much trouble, but could you teach us how to properly build a model?"

"Fu…, I have no choice then. Shall I give you a short lecture?"

Yes, she's definitely feeling better now! I think I've become better at dealing with otakus.

While I was deep in thought, I forgot about how long an otaku could talk about her favorite stuff.

Thirty minutes later--

"—And after going through these steps, you take the numbered parts and put them together—"

"Is it… finally complete?"

"Then you prepare where you will place the model."

"I-is that so."

Will she ever be finished with it?! I'm tired… this is so boring now. But I can't stop her since I asked in the first place…

"Well, then we'd be going off in a completely different direction, so I guess I can conclude it here."

"…Whew."

Finally… free at last!

"Whew… it's been a long time since I've talked for this long."

After talking for a very long time about her favorite pastime and recovering her strength, she buried herself deeply into her chair.

"After finishing up the inspection and sitting in this chair while admiring my collection, the day passes by so quickly."

"I know that feeling! I know exactly what you're saying!"

And there was a person agreeing enthusiastically.

"If these were all Meruru figures, I'd want to stare at them from here for all eternity!"

That seems more like an illness.

"But! You have more collections other than these, right? You do right?! Show me!!"

"I understand how you feel but calm down, Kirino!"

I tried to hold Kirino back, who was approaching Kaori like an agitated pitbull, but…

"How can you ever understand how I feel, you idiot!"

"Ow…! Stepping on the tip of my foot, you…!"

This attack, it's been too long! I almost missed it!

While Kirino and I were making a racket, Kuroneko calmly spoke.

"If you have any other collections, then I want to see them too."

"Fine, but before that—"

Kaori stretched her arm forward and pointed at a set of chairs.

"Can you at least let me serve you guys some tea now?"

… The reason we couldn't get any tea was because you continued rambling on and on.

****

Twenty minutes later, we were in another room of the mansion.

"My father originally bought this mansion to decorate it with fine arts, and we're using a part of it."

It seemed like each room was a gallery with a different concept. I haven't seen much of everyday commodities so far… she must have a 'normal' room too, right? But, the place we were at was…

"What's with this shabby room?"

"Is it an old… gaming room?"

Those were Kirino and Kuroneko's first impressions.

There was visible concrete on the walls and the floor (although that was probably intentional). With a very 'retro' atmosphere, the old-fashioned TV and table games caught my eye. There was a long cable stretching from the TV, and it was connected to a black gaming console that I had never seen before. Also, there was a toy racing track lined up between them.

"Fu, this gallery was made to represent the beginning of Showa period until the start of Heisei period [25] They used to have gaming consoles in small stores, and they basically served as the playground for elementary and middle school students. 'Final Fight' and 'Golden Axe' were very popular at the time. To think about it, in some places they must still be pretty popular even today." [26]

Sometimes I wonder how old she really is.

"What's this black console?"

Kuroneko asked. The fact that she didn't recognize it must make it a pretty old game.

"It's called a 'NeoGeo'. I heard it takes a half an hour to load every round, which is pretty frightening. The modern, lucky gamers probably don't know, but being able to play 'Samurai Spirits' or 'King of Fighters' at home was quite an achievement." [27]

"?! S-so you can say that this console is the symbol of SNK's golden age… it's my first time actually seeing it." [28]

Kuroneko intently stared at the console with her eyes wide open. Of course, I wouldn't understand, but it was probably an item a gamer would go ballistic for.

...They kept on discussing about games and the like, and I couldn't understand most of it so I was growing bored by the second.

As if she could read my mind, Kaori made ■ω■ (this) face and ended it this way.

"Before, there were endless anime, games, and other things that people dreamed of, but could never actually create them. But with our current technology, they all became a reality. This doesn't mean we should push aside all the great, old games from the past. It'd be a waste, right? What we enjoyed before will still be fun even if we play today. This gallery helps you remember that. That's why I like this room."

****

They say people have unique ways of thinking about different things.

For example, I really like moderately small backyards and the toasty, warm sunlight during spring.

Kuroneko and Saori, and Akagi and Sena probably have their own special favorites too.

And now… I'm probably looking at Kirino's 'perfect world'.

"Ha, Haa… What's this, what's all this… It's a paradise…"

Kirino was literally stuck to the glass displays while admiring them. Her eyes clearly showed she had gone nuts.

It was quite unsightly. It would be something you'd never be able to show to her fans.

We were in the 'imouto figure room'. It had endless types of figures all lined up, including Meruru ones. No wonder Kirino was so excited.

But enough was enough.

"Stop that now, you've been like that for ten minutes! We should take a look at other rooms too."

"I-I want to be here for a bit longer! You guys can go ahead!"

With that, she refused to budge while her hands and nose were pressed against the glass display. She appeared as if she was about to start drooling anytime. Honestly, she looked like a little kid at a toy store.

"Ha~~, you really can't help her."

It was then--

The room started shaking.

"Huh?" "W-what's happening?" "This is…"

Kaori, Kuroneko, and I started looking around.

"Whoa…!"

Kaori lost her balance and fell forwards. Different types of glasses spilled out of her survival jacket.

What kind of glasses are those—?! I didn't even have enough time to think as a stronger shock wave hit us.

"Wha.."

All the figures in the room started swaying from side to side. This means…

Kirino, who was still stuck to the display, was still in her own fantasized world.

"Wow…, the Meruru figures are moving… did my wishes really come true…?"

"It's an earthquake you idiot! Snap out of it! Now's not the time to be like this!"

I scolded her while frantically trying to pull her away by the shoulder and trying to balance myself.

"This one's huge!"

"I-it'll be dangerous if the glass displays fall over…"

The one who mentioned this was Kuroneko, who was looking up at me with a deathly pale face. She was squatting down while covering her head with her arms.

"Y-you're right. Hey, Kirino, Kaori—"

I turned around to check if everyone was alright, and I noticed Kaori struggling to pick up all her glasses off the floor. I guess she was wearing sunglasses that also acted as regular glasses. When I was about to help her--

"Found it!"

Kaori quickly put on whatever she had managed to grab. But they weren't the pair she was just wearing. Rather, they were swirly-eyed ones which I had definitely seen before. They were one of the pairs that fell out from her jacket during the first impact.

After recovering her eyesight, she yelled in a loud, urgent voice.

"Everyone, it's dangerous to stay here. We must go outside!"

"I don't want to! The Merurus will die if the display falls over…!"

Kirino cried as she held tightly onto one of the glass displays.

Are you stupid! Just leave them alo- no, I can't say that! Dammit!

While I was at a loss of what to do, it was Kaori who finally persuaded her.

"Don't worry, Kiririn-shi! An earthquake is nothing to fear for a collector! I've already made preparations for it beforehand!"

"But, it's shaking pretty hard…!"

"Please listen! My friends are more important to me!"

"!"

Kirino's eyes opened wide.

"Let's get out!" "Kyaa!"

I firmly grabbed Kirino's hand and made a dash for the exit. Kaori and Kuroneko followed suit. I held onto the railings and tried to keep my balance from the overwhelming tremor--

"…Whew… S-seems like it has calmed down…"

Kuroneko, who was also holding onto the railings, gave a huge sigh. To me, it appeared as if she was the most frightened out of all of us. But scary things are bound to happen at least once or twice for anybody.

"Hey, how much longer are you going to hold onto my hand?"

"Ah, sorry."

She swiped her hand away. Kirino and I also sighed.

Next, Kaori, who was now wearing the swirly-eyed glasses, wiped the sweat off her brows and spoke.

"Whew— that shook pretty hard. But I'm glad for now since everyone seems alright."

"… … … … … … … … … … … … …"

… … … … … … … …

"You're… Saori, aren't you."

"Gasp!"

She quickly turned away from us. Then she switched back to her sunglasses and,

"Fu, I don't know what you're talking about, Kyousuke-shi. I am Saori's sister, Kaori—"

"No, we found out already."

She really doesn't know when to quit. I casually reached for the sunglasses.

As I took them off--

"Kyaa!!"

Saori gave an ear-piercing shriek and sank down to the floor while covering her face.

"… … … … Huh?"

…W-what's with this reaction? She IS Saori… right?

I froze in place as I held the pair of sunglasses. Kirino and Kuroneko were also shocked from her sudden change.

"Y-y-you… w-why are you making Saori cry…"

"Huh?! Is this really my fault?!"

"I wasn't really paying attention, but did you just touch her hips or something?"

"You too Kuroneko? What are you saying?!"

I only took off her sunglasses, nothing else! I mean, why is Saori showing such a shy reaction similar to when someone lifts up a girl's skirt?

"W-well it's still your fault so do something…"

"A-alright… S-Saori?..."

As I called out softly, Saori flinched a little.

…She's a completely different person. I would never expect this sort of reaction from her usual self.

"Sorry for taking off your sunglasses. I'll return them now, here."

Saori stole a glance through her fingers as I held out her sunglasses.

She whispered in a completely different, weaker voice.

"H-hey…"

"Hm?"

"Did you…see it?"

"See what?"

"…My face…"

Ohh, so it was like that.

She… didn't want to show us her face.

That's why she was so embarrassed.

"I didn't see it."

"R-really?"

"Yeah, really."

Her face was blocked by her hands, but I could tell she was clearly relieved.

Yup, it definitely was like that.

Everyone has unique personal issues, and of course anyone would have one or two things to hide.

I couldn't disrespect that just out of curiosity. I lowered my head and apologized sincerely.

"I'll say it again… sorry."

"…N-no it's nothing. I, too, suddenly like this… s-sorry."

A quiet, faltering voice that's about to flicker off and lots of stuttering in her speech,

All these were different and out of place for the Saori I know well.

A loud, clear voice without a worry in the world and fluent speech,

That's how I always perceived Saori.

But if this is her 'true' face…

'…But usually I'm a bit less outgoing, you know?'

The stuff you had said when we all first met…was it really true…

How was I supposed to know. Of course I passed it off as a joke.

We returned to the room with the imouto figures.

"Ha~ sorry everyone. I didn't have any intention to trick you guys."

After putting her swirly glasses back on, she instantly returned to her usual self.

There wasn't a trace of the 'weak, shy girl' appearance.

But she was probably just acting the character of a 'perfect otaku leader' again.

And her masculine personality from before wasn't the 'real' Saori either, most likely.

She seemed to be using her different appearances (or more like glasses) to create different characters/personalities.

Instinctively.

Kirino immediately accepted Saori's apology with a "Nah, it's alright." and avoided her gaze.

Kirino and Kuroneko didn't seem like they would want to further question her 'true' self that she revealed for a short moment.

I felt the same of course.

I was ready to accept any explanation from her.

"More importantly, I'm glad the imouto figures are alright."

Things were shaking pretty intensely during the quake, but everything inside the glass displays seemed to have held up well. Around half of the figures had fallen to their sides, but thankfully the display itself had not toppled over.

"Good, she's alright too…, nothing damaged…."

Kirino checked every figure and breathed a sigh of relief.

I guess she was truly worried about these…when she said 'More importantly', she must've really meant it…

"By the way, why did you call yourself 'your sister'?"

Kuroneko sneaked in a question. She probably did it not completely out of curiosity, but to make Saori feel more comfortable through talking. She's completely different than Kirino, after all.

"I would've… never thought that you guys would actually come visit me… I was so surprised, and…"

Saori awkwardly scratched her cheeks.

"You tried to pass it off by 'creating' another character?"

"Yes. I hesitated if I should reveal the unusual side of me. There was probably a better way, now that I think about it."

"Alright."

Kuroneko replied emotionlessly, yet her voice was ever so soft.

I could tell what she was thinking without having to ask. – I felt the same too.

"Even when you're acting as another 'character', you're still you. We don't really mind."

"Yeah."

Kirino, who was facing away from us, swiftly entered our conversation.

Yep, it was like that.

She helped us get through a lot of things. And we became great friends.

So it's impossible that we would suddenly start hating on her. No matter what happens.

"Actually, you have no reason to be sorry about. You just wanted to observe us from your 'other self's' point of view."

"Kiririn-shi…"

Saori called out to her, dumbfounded. I was also astonished.

Kirino, she really… knew Saori well. When I heard it–I understood clearly. That was probably the reason. That's why Saori had lied to us.

"Then, we're the ones to be apologizing. We're very sorry for making a visit without any notice."

"Not at all! No, no, that's not it. Please don't apologize, Kyousuke-shi!"

She urgently waved her hands.

"I…I–!"

Saori couldn't continue talking, which was rare for Saori.

She frowned like she was disappointed with something, then she put on a serious expression.

"… … … … … … … …"

"…Saori?" "Hey." "What's wrong?"

After the three of us had asked out of bewilderment, Saori suddenly started laughing with a "Fufufu".

It was a laugh that showed–

She had thought of something brilliant, and could not contain her excitement.

And then she made a ωshape with her mouth, and held up a finger.

"Kiririn-shi, Kuroneko-shi, Kyousuke-shi. There's something more thrilling than just looking at collections."

"Uh…, than looking at these Meruru figures?"

After seeing Saori's unnatural appearance, Kirino seemed deeply interested. Saori nodded slowly.

"Yes…you'll probably like it."

"Sounds cool, what is it?"

"Let's all–COSPLAY!"

" " "COSPLAY?!" " "

"Yes. I actually have some costumes that I had made specifically for everyone here. There's a clothing room nearby. Fufu, Kiririn-shi–you're interested in cosplaying, if I'm not mistaken?"

"Of course!"

Kirino confidently replied. Your eyes had also shined like that during the summer Comiket.

"Don't you also want to try on some different outfits, Kuroneko-shi?"

"Well… I guess I can."

Kuroneko's face flushed slightly. What she really meant was–

'I really want to wear them!'

Saori clapped happily.

"Then let's get dressed up and take a picture, shall we?"

"…Hm. Saori prepared them for us eh… I'm a little worried."

Even when Kuroneko was talking this way, I could see her passion overflowing. She was already loosening the ribbon on her clothes. Hey, don't take it off when I'm here.

Our topic of discussion had completely changed and we returned to our normal selves.

"You don't get this opportunity every day, so I might as well cosplay too."

"Isn't it like you're cosplaying all the time?"

"Haha, Kyousuke-shi. Don't blame me when my beauty holds you captive after I dress up."

"–Ha. You sure can talk."

I guess I WAS a little excited–about how these three will turn out. I spoke in a cheery voice.

"Then, I'll wait here."

"What you're talking about, Kyousuke-shi?"

"Huh?"

Saori smiled in a way that made me feel uncomfortable.

"I've prepared a costume for you too, of course."

… … … … … … … … …

… … …Are you serious.

****

The girls were to return to this figure room after they finish dressing up.

Meanwhile, I was changing in this room.

After being alone in this quiet room, I suddenly revolted at the sight of the sheer amount of figurines in this room. Especially when the Meruru army was smiling at me while toppled over during the earthquake. It's was very creepy.

"I guess I'll change now."

Kyousuke Kousaka, age 18. I'm about to have my first cosplaying experience.

Saori had handed me the costume of a familiar character for me to wear.

"…How the heck do you…put on this cape?"

After a while of struggle, I finished up and stood in front of a mirror.

"… … … … Ohhh."

It's a little weird for me to say this myself, but I looked pretty damn good.

My face started heating up. What is this, this mixed feeling of embarrassment and excitement…

After seeing myself in this costume, I was completely thrilled.

"Wow…, I look so cool! Is this for real? I look amazing!"

Stop saying such arrogant things! Anyone cosplaying for the first time would be like this!

I imitated the character I was cosplaying as, and spread out my cape.

"Come hither, 'Cerberos'!" [29]

Man, this is a killer! These words are just flowing out of my mouth! I'm such an awesome guy, but it's a little embarrassing! I guess when you cosplay, you really turn into a narcissist.

And just then–

Creak, I heard the door open. A cold shiver ran down my spine.

C-crap, could they have possibly heard what I had said just now? Suicide…?! Is suicide the only option to end my eternal embarrassment?!

I turned my stiff body around to face the door, and –

" "… !!" "

We were both speechless.

"You…you're Kuroneko?!"

Kuroneko was also wearing clothes that I was familiar with.

'Alpha Omega' – The antagonist of the Stardust Witch Meruru series that Bridget was always cosplaying as.

"Uh…, Ah…, Shi-shi-shikyouku..?" [30]

Kuroneko had all her reasons to be surprised at my appearance. I was dressed up as the main character of her favorite show, 'Maschera'.

It's awkward for me to say this too, but I looked very similar. If they were making a real-life version of the anime, they should be hiring me. But right now…

We stared at each other's costumes.

Kuroneko regained her senses and,

"…S-stop staring at me so much… it's embarrassing…"

Even her ears were dyed scarlet as she hastily covered herself.

She was wearing a vampire-like cape, but it was overall a very revealing costume. I was impressed that a shy person like Kuroneko was able to wear it.

"…I told you to stop looking. D-do you want to go blind?"

"S-sorry!"

I frantically covered my eyes with my hands.

If you're going to be embarrassed that much, why bother wearing it in the first place…?

"M-more importantly… you… that costume…"

"Oh, this?"

It was a little embarrassing but I still went ahead and asked.

"H-how is it Kuroneko? How do I…look..?"

"Uh… Huh?"

Kuroneko flinched. She probably wasn't expecting this question from me.

She really seemed embarrassed by her own cosplay. Her face was redder than ever.

"I-it's not that good."

Kuroneko kept stealing glances at me while saying that. She really likes the character I was cosplaying as, and that spiked her interest.

It felt good, to be honest.

"Heh, stop looking at me like that. It's embarrassing for me too."

"S-stupid… like I would…what are you talking about…"

Kuroneko was really cute like this.

Just then–

"Hah, what kind of clothes are those! Looks good though!"

Kirino returned to the room, full of energy. And her costume was unexpected.

"Not as much as me though!"

She grabbed the edges of her skirt and did a complete spin in place. Kirino was surprisingly wearing the 'Queen of Nightmare' outfit from Maschera.

The one Kuroneko usually wears.

It gave us quite a shock.

" "…" "

For a while, Kuroneko and I were at a loss for words.

"What is it? Am I that dazzling?"

I shouldn't be talking, but wow, that confidence… Cosplaying really does make people narcissistic. Eh, she always was one though.

And I'm not going to say it out loud, but for the record, I thought Kirino's cosplay looked awkward, but very cute. I thought a model like her would look good in any type of clothes, but I would've never thought a goth lolita costume would too…

Her brown hair was the source of the problem.

If she was blonde or had black hair, she wouldn't have looked so out of place.

Kuroneko asked with her eyes opened wide.

"You, didn't you say you hate Maschera?"

"Huh? The clothes don't matter. I always wanted to try on a goth lolita costume at least once."

I see. So you would wear anything if you looked cute in it. Sigh, now really.

Kuroneko frowned. She was deeply irritated about something.

"Cosplaying with such simple thoughts… Transforming into a character you love is the real purpose, you're clearly not getting it."

"Really? Mm, transformation eh… Like this?"

Kirino made a V-sign with her hand and placed it horizontally next to her eyes and winked.

Then she started talking like Meruru.

"Ya-hoo~☆ I'm Queen of Nightmare ♪from the deepest depths of hell, stuff like this? (' -^*)"

"The Queen would never say something like that!!!"

Kuroneko shouted. Like Kirino, she also got easily agitated when dealing with Maschera. She's such a little kid.

"Ke...ke…I-I'm really going to kill you…"

"Hey, you aren't talking like Aru-chan either. She would never say something like 'I'm going to kill you'~" [31]

"I-I was never planning to dress up like her anyway…"

"Then doesn't that contradict with what you said about the purpose of cosplaying?"

"…T-that is…"

Her words had bounced back to haunt her. Looking at a speechless Kuroneko, Kirino put on a faint, naughty smile, that somewhat resembled Kanako.

"Alright, say Aru-chan's lines. You heard her at the festival before, right?"

"I-I don't want to… Why should I…"

Click. Click.

Kirino had taken out her cell phone and started taking pictures of Kuroneko.

"When did you take that out… W-why are you doing that!"

"Might as well."

"S-stop that…"

Click. Click.

"I told you to stop doing that… are you deaf?"

"If you make a photo album with that cosplay, it's gonna be so popular at Comiket~"

Yep, she wasn't listening. Kuroneko looked pitiful, but I didn't really feel like stopping Kirino. Her reaction was too cute. Kirino was deeply concentrated in storing her friend's cosplaying on her cell phone.

She definitely liked Kuroneko, there is no doubt.

"Whew… I'm satisfied."

Kirino wiped away the large beads of sweat mingling on her forehead. On the other hand, Kuroneko was scrunched up on the ground, blushing furiously. She's a cosplayer, but she's too self-conscious!

"Hey, Kirino."

"What is it?"

"How's my costume? Doesn't it look cool?"

Wearing this costume had made me more confident, and I asked something I normally wouldn't have.

"Yeah, yeah. Looks alright."

But her response was empty of sincerity.

"Hey, at least look closely before saying that."

Praise me too, instead of playing around with Kuroneko all the time.

"Ugh…how annoying. Sigh…you really can't control a narcissist, who only has such a plain-looking face."

"… … … … … …"

You're the last person I want to hear that from.

"B-by the way, where's Saori?"

"Huh? She said she wanted to change after I finished."

"Hm."

"It was kind of weird, the way she suddenly said she wanted to cosplay."

"Yeah."

Saori's behaviour was, without a doubt, a little peculiar at that time. I was able to instinctively assume what her 'smile' had meant .

She was probably very good-looking.

It was all true, the way she boasted about her beauty.

So when she smiled like that, she had planned to surprise us by showing her naked face. Possibly.

I didn't forget about how she's so shy about it though.

But maybe that's why she suggested cosplaying…?

It's reasonable to assume that Saori had a costume that wouldn't make her feel so embarrassed while revealing herself.

Knowing this intention, I can't let myself be surprised. Kirino and Kuroneko might, but I sure won't be. No matter what kind of costume Saori puts on.

"Ah, is Saori here?"

I heard Kirino's voice, followed by the sound of the door opening.

Alright…! Hit me with all you've got Saori!



"Sorry that took so long, everyone."

"WHO ARE YOU–?!"

What? Could it really be? This is Saori? This woman wearing such a charming school uniform?

This is dangeroussssssss!! It's dangerous. REALLY dangerous, this Saori. First, she's beautiful. Absolutely stunning!

And with her smooth, silky-looking hair and supermodel-like chest and hips!

I wouldn't normally be shocked by seeing a same person without glasses on. But Saori… she was dangerous. There wasn't a trace of her usual appearance. Even her voice was different. This is really dangerous you guys… You need to know how it feels to have an unimaginably, most beautiful woman suddenly appear in front of you.

"Hey… Aren't you being a little TOO surprised..?"

My little sister couldn't believe how I was acting.

…But I thought I was going to get a heart attack…

I knew she'd be good-looking, but I couldn't help but think her face might be something like this 3ω3 too. Who knew it'd be this much…

"T-this is more like a complete transformation isn't it…"

Kuroneko was frozen in place, staring at her.

Saori put her hand near her mouth and smiled elegantly.

"I'm happy to see such reactions. I'm glad I revealed my normal self."

Then she lightly held onto the edges of her skirt, and gave us a polite greeting.

"Kyousuke-shi, Kiririn-shi, Kuroneko-shi, nice to meet you. My name is Saori Makishima."

"That's–your real name?"

"Yes."

She tilted her head ever so slightly as she greeted us. There wasn't a hint of awkwardness in the gesture. It appeared perfectly natural, like she does this often.

"That's the uniform for the school we passed on the way…right?"

"…Is that really cosplay, or…"

Kirino and Kuroneko asked with lingering curiosity.

"Fufu."

Saori wore a mysterious smile, but did not say anything.

Kuroneko did not question her further. But–

'Nice to meet you. My name is Saori Makishima."

Her feelings were clearly delivered.

Saori faced us and expressed her feelings.

"Everyone looks really great in those costumes."

"Not as much as you."

"…. Thanks."

T-this feels weird. Don't smile with that face… you're making my heart beat faster….

Saori started blushing.

"But I still find it a little embarrassing."

"…Fu…, that's what you get. You forced me to wear a maid costume before. Do you understand a little better about how I felt back then?"

"Fufu, I remember you two being overjoyed to be changing into those…"

"Were we? But even if we were determined to dress that way, what's embarrassing is still embarrassing."

"I guess so."

Heh, seems like my predictions were quite off. Saori didn't cosplay just to hide her embarrassment from showing us her face. She was confidently showing it to us even if she was embarrassed like back when she was covering her face. That's how I understood it.

"But revealing it so openly like this, it really is embarrassing."

"Eh, really? What's there to be embarrassed about? That gets me a little irritated, since I'm so very cute unlike you guys."

"Ugh…."

Yeah, yeah. She's definitely a narcissist. Of course you wouldn't be embarrassed about anything.

By the way, this is something I'll keep only to myself, but it was clear that my cosplaying was the most fitting.

I thought I looked so much better out of all of us.

Unfortunately no one recognized that, but I won no matter how you looked at it. Hmph, serves them right.

At that moment, Saori complimented me as if she could read my mind.

"Kyousuke-shi's Shikyouku looks identical to the character, and it's quite amazing and attractive."

"Huh? R-really? Heh…"

What should I do, I'm so happy. Finally… finally I've found someone who can praise others!

"Kiririn-shi's 'Queen of Nightmare' gives off a different atmosphere than the actual character–but I think it looks cuter that way."

"Isn't it? You know it well! That cosplaying isn't only about dressing similarly."

"Yes, as expected from Kiririn-shi. You sure know what you're talking about too."

Traces of her otaku self still remained in her speech. [32]

"And Kuroneko-shi–"

"W-what is it, stop looking at me."

Kuroneko reddened her face as Saori drew her gaze upon her.

"… Cute and seductive Aru… it's quite a dirty sight."

Are you some perverted old man?

Kuroneko couldn't believe what Saori had just told her.

"…Your personality didn't change at all."

"Oh, really?"

Saori put a hand to her mouth and laughed softly.

This is what I think… Like I was getting all excited from seeing myself in a mirror, I think the fun in cosplaying is being able to transform into 'your unusual self'. And if it is a character you like, that's a bonus.

Meeting others or taking pictures while cosplaying to leave a fond memory are ways to express your 'different' self, like making games or drawing comics.

This is the same when being involved in circles. Instead of cosplaying by yourself–

"Everyone, let's all take a picture together soon. Okay?"

"Mm, alright."

"Fine with me. I'll take some for us for free, as a special treat."

"… Well, I don't have a reason to refuse…"

It's much more fun to do it as a group.

Everyone laughing while dressed in fancy costumes…

When we look at the picture later on, I guess we'll get another taste of how embarrassed we feel. That's how we'll preserve memories.

Showing your cosplay to others is something childish and unpleasant.

I'm not sure if that's a normal reaction, but I don't have any intentions of denying it.

For someone like me who has already done it–

'There's nothing much bad about cosplaying?'

That's what I thought.

If I lived like a normal person, I would never been able to experience something like this.

"Um, I was meaning to ask for a while now…"

As I was finishing up my thoughts, Saori called out to me.

"Hm? What is it?"

"What is the reason behind everyone coming here to visit me today…?"

"That is–"

I could not lie because of her wearing such a serious expression.

I turned back and both Kirino and Kuroneko nodded their heads. …Alright.

"Hey, um. You seemed pretty down when we all met last time…"

"That's like the first time seeing you like this–we couldn't help but be worried."

"Fu, you thought you were hiding it well and we wouldn't notice?"

As I started talking, Kirino and Kuroneko also piped in.

"Everyone was…worried about me? Is that why you came all the way…?"

"Stop talking about it like it's something strange. Of course we would be worried if our friend was unhappy. You also came to cheer me up when Kirino was gone and I was depressed."

"Heh, you were all sad while I was gone?"

Ah, Kyousuke, you dumbass! Don't say that while she's here with us!

"Shut up! We're talking about something important so don't butt in!"

Stop guffawing away like I'm some sort of idiot!

"A-anyways, it's the same for you! You've done a lot for us–no, even if that's not the case! It's weird to see you feeling so down. Sometimes you should let us do something for you too!"

"… Kyousuke-shi."

Large teardrops started forming on Saori's face as she crossed her arms.

That appearance… it's really dangerous, you know!

My 'affection points' for you have already surpassed the maximum even without it…! [33]

"OW?!"

My sister suddenly tugged on my ear. Then Kuroneko kicked my shin from behind.

"W-what the hell are you two doing?!"

"Stop smirking like that! Disgusting! That's really disgusting!"

"Acting that way just because Saori's looks were out of your expectations… what a lustful male."

W-what are they getting so irritated for…

"Fu…, hehehe…"

Saori held her stomach and unleashed a laughter.

"AHA, HAHAHAHA–"

"W-what is it?"

"Ah, it's nothing… I just never expected to show this side of myself to everyone."

She spoke in a similar way as when Kuroneko was revealing her real name.

"I see."

Now that I think about it, it's been over a year since we all met, yet I barely know anything about you. Having been acquainted through the internet, I kept using your online name to address you, and I've never seen your bare face either until now.

You lived far away, and didn't go to the same school as me, unlike Kuroneko.

If we hadn't made a visit today, it's possible that we would've never been able to learn her name and her true self. When I think about it that way, although this might be something Saori wouldn't like to hear–

"I'm happy that I got to know you a little better."

"…Yes, I'm also happy."

Saori nodded and looked at each of us one by one.

"May I briefly talk a bit more about myself?"

Saori started telling us about her past.

"To be honest, I don't really own everything in this mansion."

"Then by whom?"

I asked enthusiastically.

"My older sister–and her friends have left some of their belongings here."

"You really have a sister, huh. Then–"

"Yes, she's the person I was imitating before. Her name is Kaori Makishima–she was a huge fan of survival games and robot models. She had almost a male-like, unique personality."

The peculiar clothing and speech were actually based off another real person…?

"She and her friends used to play survival games, watch anime often, build robot models… and visit Akihabara. They also collected model guns and figurines–the products for otakus."

"Mm, I see. It's not uncommon to develop such hobbies under the influence of siblings."

Kuroneko added.

Yeah, that's true actually. My sister also got me into playing eroge.

Saori smiled as she was indulged in her past, enjoyable memories.

"Yes… we always used to play together. We were also really– close to each other. Just like all of us right now."

"I see."

"Although, they all disappeared."

"Why?"

Hey Kirino, is that really something alright to ask…

Upon hearing the question, Saori continued to put on a weak smile and opened her mouth.

"For many reasons."

She spoke in a slightly depressing tone.

"It's probably because my sister got married and moved overseas. She was the leader of our group. In any relationship with others that appears solid at first sight, if a large gear falls off, the entire structure is bound to easily collapse."

'Even when only a single person leaves–'

I remember hearing something similar before.

Ah, that's right. She had said it when Kirino was gone.

"There was also a person who said that she would get rid of her doujinshi and robot models because she got a 'normal' boyfriend. …Another person left immediately for Germany after graduating high school, saying that he would leave behind all his favorite games and comics in Japan because he wanted to put all his efforts into his research. Then our usual survival gaming place got torn down, so some people started hanging out in different places. …And so everyone left one by one and I was eventually left all alone. Only their belongings that they've left behind and the happy memories remained."

Saori formed the shape of a gun with her hands and made a firing motion.

"That's why I thought if I don't play with them, they would feel lonely." [34]

That's why she was playing the survival game all by herself while dressed like that.

But...it wasn't the precious belongings that were lonely.

'Friends aren't meant to stay by your side forever.'

That's right. When Kirino left to study abroad without a word, Saori must've been furious.

Kirino seemed to realize that herself because she wore an uncomfortable, concealed expression.

"Of course I sometimes told myself to give up because I couldn't do anything about it. I truly loved everyone in the circle but they were ultimately pulled in by my sister's charms. It's not surprising at all that everything lost its allure once she left."

Her voice was soaked with sadness. It was something unimaginable coming from someone like her, who would always smile brightly, no matter what.

Saori confidently lifted her head and continued.

"Then one day… I got an idea that I should create my own group which would revolve around me. I thought that as long as I'm a part of it, hopefully those friends would stay with me… That's why–"

"You created the SNS community… and met up with all of us?"

Kuroneko asked.

"Yes. I had gathered all of my… non-existent courage. Someone timid like me becoming the leader of a group… would I be able to handle it… I was constantly worried."

'Haha, this is a little embarrassing... Actually, this is my first time organizing an offline meeting. I put in a lot of effort to make up a personality suitable for a leader so that I'd be liked by everyone as much as possible.'

… She had said something like that.

The unusual clothing and with her unnatural speech, I sort of neglected her back then.

But this Saori… she was putting in all her efforts?

Was that the result of her overflowing passion?

Really… what is that, just… I spoke with contradicting emotions.

"What a foolish lady you are."

"I was definitely foolish."

Saori embarrassedly scratched her cheeks. Her actions were the same as the usual Saori, although she had a different appearance, she was definitely our friend.

"But you seemed very relaxed during the summer Comiket. You seemed to know a lot of people."

"I was acquainted with them through my father's workplace and my sister. The only human relation I had ever established with my own hands is the community. If I had looked relaxed, that simply meant I was putting on a good act."

"…Is that so."

Man, this is really…

"You thought that we would actually disappear?"

"B-but you really did, though…"

"Ah…"

Kirino, you idiot. You don't deserve to say something like that.

"I'll be here for a while. But even if I have to leave in the future…"

Kirino put it simply.

"I'll never give up my hobbies. I'll never stop being your friend. –Got any problems?"

"…I've talked about this a few times before, but I don't have a lot of friends… Fufufu… don't think you'll be able to run away from my 'curse'."

Kuroneko also portrayed her feelings, but in an indirect manner.

"Well, we can't tell what's going to happen later on, but I don't think there's anything for you to be worried about. I also like you, and the school I was planning to go to isn't far away, so we shouldn't have problems meeting up."

Finally, I delivered my own feelings. And then–

"…Alright…!"

Saori smiled and caught a few tears with her fingers.

"Hey, hey… don't cry…"

"It's because I'm so happy… I never planned this event, yet…."

I guess you should be. We've always relied on you too much. Like when we were hanging out, you were the one making the plans alone.

Seeing her so happy somehow made me feel kind of apologetic.

Kuroneko handed her a handkerchief.

"You shouldn't really be thanking us. We just did what we wanted to do."

Saori always used to say something like this when she was taking us around.

Kirino also put on a wide, playful smile.

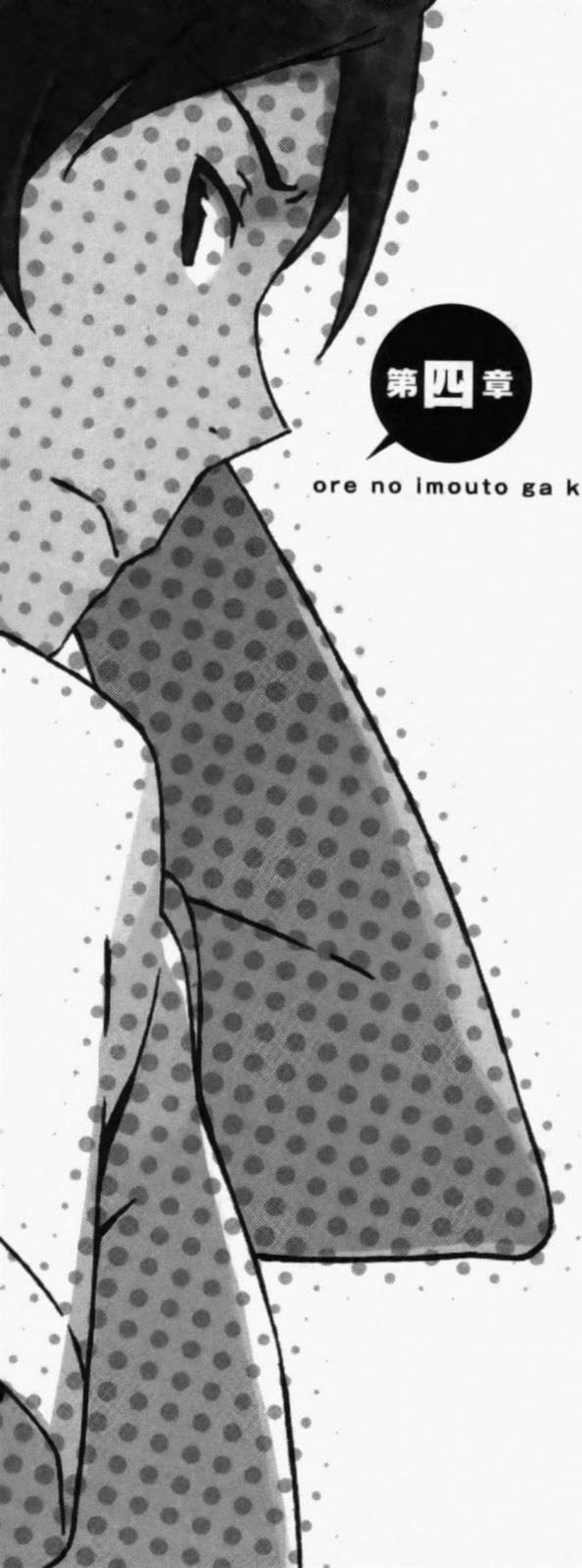
"Alright! Now that we've cosplayed–"

"We'll all take a picture together now, right?"

And so, a new gloomy past formed that day. Simply looking at the picture would make me uncomfortable enough to faint.

I'll probably never forget it as long as I live.

Chapter 4



第四章

Ria Hagry is a twelve-year-old girl who was Kirino's roommate while she was training in America.

According to Kirino–she's the fastest kid in existence.

She's a superstar who even defeated Kirino, when my sister excelled in middle school tournaments.

Moist, brown skin. Long, slim legs. Her smooth, black hair tied up in a ponytail. Along with her petite physique, she also had a lot of talents–often being referred to as a genius in the news.

The thing is–I'm not very fond of the word 'genius'. I've always thought that a genius is a person who works much harder than others. It's definitely something to be proud of, because in the end he's just a plain human being, like all of us. But the sheer ignorance of all their sincere efforts–all their tears, sweat, and bloodshed, and merely declaring someone a genius or talented is extremely rude.

Of course, I would be no match for her. Because unlike me, she truly was a 'genius'.

Although, this is just a pathetic excuse to make my lazy self feel better. A person who doesn't put nearly as much effort into anything shouldn't even deserve to say something like this.

But I do still believe that natural talents exist.

Exceptional athletic abilities, intelligence, and beauty. People with blessings indubitably do exist, even though rare. My sister is probably one of them. Because if not, I doubt she'd be able to show all the sorts of capabilities even if she makes multiple times the effort of everyone else. Well, for example, she couldn't have earned her good looks through extra effort. All the women around the world would call her silly.

Ah, think I went off track for a bit.

Anyways, if we're just dealing with running, my little sister is far from the level of a genius. She's no match for someone who had always focused all the overflowing talents on her legs, practicing much more than her every passing day.

But I remember when Kirino talked about how she had once beaten the 'unsurpassable enemy'.

And the enemy was none other than Ria, out of all the elite runners around the world.

How Kirino managed to outshine someone who is clearly out of her league is beyond me.

I still wonder to this day.

Enough with this serious talk, how about we discuss about Lolita complex?

… … … … … No, wait! I'm completely serious!

Please, just listen to me. It's a pretty important issue!

Lolita complex refers to having affection towards young, little girls. The term originated from Vladimir Nabokov's novel, "Lolita".

In shortened form, loli-con. It's used quite regularly so I'm sure you know what that is.

The word gives off a terrible impression.

You can't help but think about child pornography, and it's pretty much like…openly declaring that you are a pedophile. Even someone like me who has a nickname of 'sexual-harassment senpai' at school do not wish to be called a loli-con.

That damned brat–Kanako is always branding me off as one, but this is all a huge misunderstanding.

I've seen Kanako's panties and given her a full-body massage before, but I didn't feel anything out of the ordinary. There's my proof.

So yeah, I'm definitely not a loli-con.

To be specific, I prefer someone more mature, like Ayase.

Ayase>>>>>>>>>>(Impassable Angel's wall~)
>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>Sena (♥ breasts)
>>>>Fate-san>>Bridget>>>>>>>>>>>>>Kanako

And that's how it is. Hope you all understand.

Well, yes. All the eroge I play include Lolita content.

But it's not like I'm playing out of personal interest, and if you're thinking about using that to call me a loli-con, my sister is an infinitely bigger one.

She's more of a sis-con, actually.

Although Lolita complex and sister complex seem quite similar, there are certain differences–but let's leave that aside for now.

Because this is not the time for that.

I'm finishing up the intro right about here– because there's something more serious I want to talk about.

That's why.

The reason I suddenly started denying that I'm a loli-con is–,

---

Is because there was a little girl standing right in front of me, completely naked.

"…"

I found myself staring at her unconsciously.

The girl, who was confidently standing at the doorway of our house, had smooth, brown skin.

She definitely wasn't a Japanese native, no matter how you looked at her.

It looked like she had just finished taking a bath, because her body and her black hair were still wet. There was steam rising from her entire body. She held a bath towel, but seemed to have no intention of covering herself up.

She was facing away, and that's why she didn't notice me standing here.

Although she was short, I found her long, slim legs, and her elegantly stretched back to be quite attractive.

"…Ah…"

How did I start criticising a nude girl right as I got home…?

I was standing stock still at the entrance with my mouth gaping open. I hadn't even taken my shoes off.

"… … … … … … … … How and when did I advance so far in this eroge?"

That was a pretty crazy thing to say, even for me.

I hope you understand how surprised I was.

Basically, I had just returned home from school, said my greetings and opened the door, and all this was laid out in front of me. You still might not get it, but just hang on a bit, will you.

She looked back because of what I had blurted out just now.

"Ah…"

Her eyes widened as she noticed me standing here. I was expecting her to scream, like in a usual event in eroge, but…

"Heheheh."

She instead revealed a wide grin.

"Mm…"

It was such an attractive smile to make my heart beat faste–no, that's not it!

Finally regaining full consciousness, I covered my eyes with a hand and shouted at her.

"You…what are you…! C-cover up your body!"

"Hm? Body?"

She sounded like she had no idea what I was trying to say. It was nice that at least she understood Japanese, but my true meaning didn't seem to reach her.

This was extremely dangerous! If someone else saw what was happening right now–

"Ria! I always told you to dress up before you go outside! What if someone comes in while you're all naked–!"

I reacted to my sister's angry voice and lowered my hand. And there was Kirino, walking out of the changing room, holding only a single bath towel.

"…!" "Ah…ah…?!"

We both froze as our eyes met. My head suddenly stopped functioning and I couldn't perceive what was happening in front of me.

And then–

Whoosh–the bath towel dropped onto the floor.

"K-kyaaa

"…What are you looking at, you? If you've got any problems, speak up now."

Well, since she wanted this in the first place and she looks really excited, I shouldn't be worrying about it at all. Since it'd just be too much of a hassle for me to object, fine. Have it your way.

"I've got no complaints. I'm just hoping that you're bringing a cute girl to live with us for a while."

I didn't want to say how I truly felt about this out loud, so I just smoothed it out.

Then Kirino gave me a disgusted look.

"If you ever touch her, I'm going to kill you… you loli-con."

"…Loli-con? Hey, what are you talking about?"

Kirino ignored me. Disregarding Kirino's huge misunderstanding, Dad asked her a question.

"Kirino, what kind of a person is your friend?"

"Her name's Ria, and this is her."

Kirino had prepared a magazine beforehand. It was one for athletes.

Aha, that's what she meant by 'loli-con'.

On the page, I saw a familiar face and name from the news the other day.

'Angel of the tracks – Ms. Ria Hagry (12 yrs old)'

It had a picture of a girl in track pants, stretching. Her healthy brown skin and ponytail. Long, smooth legs. It was like seeing a strong, sturdy horse in human form.

"This person… the one you beat just once…"

"Yep."

Kirino replied coldly. Then she continued to speak in a lively, cheery tone to the rest of the family.

"She was my roommate in the US. We're really close friends, and um…"

Then Kirino smiled embarrassingly.

"She's also like my little sister."

Aha, I understand.

You… I guess reuniting with your 'little sister' would never ever make you painful.

…Hm.

So someone who Kirino considers as her little sister is coming to visit...

That sounds like an 'if situation'? (Note: Visual novel reference. Ex. Kirino and Kyousuke not being blood-related in the PSP Oreimo game)

'What would happen if Kirino had a little sister'–something like that.

But that's like also saying 'What if I had a second little sister?'… In my honest opinion, I'm more than happy with just having Kirino as one. That's how I truly feel.

'Kirino's little sister' is coming to Kousaka residence.

I started fantasizing on what was going to happen.

And a few days later–,

"Get out!"

"Hey, hey… about now, I couldn't help but…"

"Just get out already, you pervert! Get out of here right now!"

–I'm getting beaten down after seeing 'Kirino's little sister' naked.

Kirino unleashed a barrage of kicks, dragged Ria into the changing room, quickly put on some clothes, and returned to the entrance.

And then.

"Don't ever come back!"

She started pushing me roughly with tears glinting in her eyes.

By the way, I was standing here the whole time without even taking my shoes off.

"Wait! Just hang on a second, Kirino–"

I really don't get it. How am I being kicked out as soon as I get home?

You probably understand the situation from what I've said before. I didn't do anything wrong! The certain person who put on a bath towel loosely, and the one that came out of the changing room naked are at fault.

"You're unbelievable, you're always–"

Not paying much attention to Kirino's lecture, I stole a glance at the hallway.

The girl with brown skin–Ria's head was poking out of the changing room. She was intently watching our fight.

"…Mm."

She tossed us an intrigued look, while drying her hair with the blow dryer.

I was a little surprised, because it was such an innocent look–at least I thought it was.

She still seemed to be in the middle of changing–I could see her exposed collarbone from time to time.

I'll be having my 'worst-ever first confrontation with a person' any time soon…

Does she not feel any shyness or embarrassment? Even though she's only in elementary school, I'd expect a girl to be less exposed and be more mindful.

"Hey, loli-con! Look at me while I'm talking to y–?!"

Kirino caught me staring at Ria.

"R-Ria! How long are you going to just stand there!"

"Aha, Kirino's so scary."

"Quiet! Change into something, quick!"

Kirino scolded her with overwhelming rage.

Ria cried "Wah~," and pulled herself back into the changing room.

Hm? What's with her reaction?

It's because,

'We're really close friends, and um…she's also like my little sister."

That's how Kirino had described Ria before.

And since she clearly cannot be saved from the addiction to 'moe little sisters', I expected her to treat Ria preciously, like the characters from her eroge. But it didn't seem like that at all.

"Aha, Kirino, why are you so angry?"

"How can I not?! You stay out of this! Only if you hadn't ran all the way here from the airport and told me that you were all sweaty…"

"But Kirino suggested taking a bath together."

"W-well, that's true, but…"

This is like–watching normal siblings argue.

She probably doesn't even show this side of her to her school friends.

But this was a bad time to ask her about that right now.

Well, let's take care of this later. I put my hands together and apologized once again.

"Come on, I said I'm sorry–please forgive me."

"…Huh? You're still standing here? I thought I already told you to leave, could you please get the hell out right now?"

Ugh. Let's calm down here.

This is so absurd that even I'm starting to get mad here!

"That's why I'm apologizing again and again! I already explained that it was just an accident! How can you kick me out for such a silly thing like this?"

"Wha–... How dare you call it silly! Do you even know what you–just did to me right now?!"

"I have absolutely no clue. It's not like I feel anything weird after seeing you naked. We're just siblings after all."

After finally laying out all I wanted to say,

"Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr…."

Kirino started trembling and started gathering all her energy for an outburst. I guess I just hit a bull's-eye on her temper.

….Ahh, this is bad. She'll go insane in a few seconds if this continues.

The first fight since the return of my little sister was about to break out between the siblings.

I just decided to let whatever was about to happen.

But surprisingly, the one who broke this tension was the original cause of all this, Ria.

She was still changing into her clothes just a moment ago, but she had soundlessly snuck up right behind Kirino. She was wearing a pair of shorts and a sleeveless shirt–a very childish attire. She also had her hair bundled up in a ponytail like from the magazine.

She was the reason we all started fighting, but she didn't seem to care at all.



Ria reached out to Kirino (who was in a countdown) behind her back. I was wondering what she was about to do, and then,

She grabbed Kirino's skirt, and forcefully lifted it.

"Ah–∑(゜Д゜;)" Kirino cried and froze completely in place.

After a second,

"KYAA!"

She gave an ear-piercing shriek and pulled it right back down.

As Kirino looked back menacingly, Ria stood there giggling.

"Ah, ah, ahhh…"

With her face dyed scarlet, she turned back to face me.

"Did you see it?!"

"N-no, I didn't!"

I objected with my limbs flailing all over the place. But there was no way Kirino would ever believe that.

"Liar! You definitely saw it!"

…Why am I having this sort of conversation with my own sister–just stop it right now, will you. Stop showing me things that I don't even want to see in the first place.

I was prepared to take a few beatings, but Ria interjected from behind Kirino.

"Kirino's panties are so tight, doesn't it feel uncomfortable?"

"Y-you damned brat!"

Kirino finally lost it and turned back to swing her fist at Ria. Whoosh, she did it without any sort of hesitation.

It was like seeing a punch directed at me, that's how mad she was.

"Hehe, I'm not getting hit."

But Ria swiftly ducked to dodge Kirino's blow.

And then,

She started doing flips in mid-air, one after another.

Somehow, there was barely any sound. It was as if she didn't have any weight.

She cleanly nailed her landing like an acrobat, but then–

"You…!"

Kirino made a dash and tackled her using her speed.

"Whoa.."

No matter how fast Ria was, she fell prey to Kirino's attack and fell.

Just pointing out, but from where I was standing, I could see Kirino's panties very clearly. You were so mad over it before–aren't you being a little too careless now…

"Caught you…! Ria, don't you dare cross the line again!"

"Hehehehehe! Can I tickle Kirino's armpits?"

"You should be apologizing! Why do you keep teasing me and making a fool out of me? What do you want from me?"

"That's because Kirino was angry because of me, hehehe! Hahaha! But you kept on fighting with your brother, hahaha! S-stop! Forgive me, please…"

Ria laughed uncontrollably as Kirino continued tickling her.

It looked like Kirino was taking revenge on Kuroneko's armpit attack on someone else.

But, I see it now.

The reason Ria decided to lift Kirino's skirt was to direct her anger away from me and towards her.

This kid, she's not too bad after all. It was all thanks to Ria that Kirino's temper slowly calmed (although she was the culprit in the first place).

I should really be thankful that the huge fight between us was stopped before it got any worse.

"I-I'm done with this. Ha…, I always feel stupid whenever I get mad at you."

Kirino stopped tickling Ria. That's something I'd like to say to you.

And after being freed from the suffering,

"Whew, finally."

Ria breathed a sigh of relief.

Then she quickly got up and rubbed her tear-filled brown eyes.

"Ria, there's a perverted loli-con here, so let's play outside until Mom returns home. I'll introduce you to my school friends."

"Okay."

What do you mean, 'okay'. Standing there all exposed then letting Kirino call me a loli-con. I wonder how the little sisters in this household were educated.

I thought Kirino would just let go of what had happened, but she still seemed irritated.

Her words had a bit more sharpness to them than usual.

"Kirino, I want to visit the Tokyo Tower–!"

"Okay, okay, we can go there later. But how are you so energetic when you just arrived here today? Have you adjusted to the new time zone already?"

"What do you mean?"

She was one energetic fellow.

Didn't she run all the way here from the airport!?

"Then let's get ready to leave in my room."

"But I'm already done preparing?"

"Huh? What do you mean? You didn't even finish drying your hair before tying it up! That's why you're–ugh, never mind! I'll do it for you so bring all the tools up to my room!"

"Okay… Che, what a bother."

An annoying big sister, and a little sister who still follows her well.

They definitely looked like ordinary siblings.

"Hey you loli-con! You get out of here too!"

Kirino gave me a cold stare, and then went upstairs.

And so only Ria and I were left at the entrance. I still hadn't taken off my shoes.

…Uh, let's see, what should I say…

"Hehehe."

Ria smiled at me.

"Mm, lots of stuff was going on so I couldn't introduce myself properly, so my name is Ria! I'll be staying here for a little while!"

"…I'm Kyousuke Kousaka. Sorry about before."

"Hehe, that's fine. It's nothing. Do you want to see it again?"

"HECK NO!"

And so our first encounter started off with a bang.

It was a shocking one, but she seemed alright, and she looked like someone that'd listen to me well.

Of course, it could be just my imagination.

Anyways, she certainly was carefree and outgoing.

But…how should I put this, my expectations of her were being crumbled to dust.

She just seemed like an ordinary, energetic kid.

Strangely affectionate, too.

Mm. Maybe if Rock turned into a girl, it'd feel something like this.

Actually, that's a terrible comparison, even when I think about it.

'Look at me, An-chan! I became a girl!'

I shuddered at the thought.

I noticed that Ria was closely watching me rub my temples.

"Mm, so you're Kirino's Onii-chan, right?"

"Yep, that's right."

She spoke Japanese very well, but her tone was kind of rude. Who did she learn from?

Ria pressed her index finger against her lips, and–

"Really, hm…"

She laughed mischievously.

"…Why do you ask?"

"Hm? Ria wanted to meet Kirino's Onii-chan. Can I call you Kyousuke Onii-chan?"

"Do what you'd like. But, you actually wanted to meet me?"

"Yeah! I thought you'd definitely be an amazing person!"

"Aha~. Were you disappointed because I wasn't?"

"No, you're exactly how I imagined you'd be!"

Ria shook her head. I nonchalantly turned away and replied.

"Oh, really. That's good."

"Ah, you don't believe me? …I wasn't lying."

"Yeah, yeah."

I lightly brushed it off, but I was seriously shaking on the inside. This was the first time a girl had ever openly revealed that she liked me.

And she really didn't seem to be lying.

Moreover, she even suddenly started hugging me.

"I really like you, Onii-chan!"

"Whoa!"

W-why would you be saying that right now?!

"See, I wasn't lying, right?"

"I never doubted anything! Hey, hey, stop!"

"Huh~? Why, what's wrong with this?"

"I'll be dead if Kirino comes down right now!"

I frantically detached myself from Ria.

Man, she seriously seems like a character from an eroge.

Or do all foreigners show affection this way? I didn't really know if I should accept it from a Japanese perspective.

…What. What's going on.

When I look at her, I just–my heart feels all tingly.

What does this mean…

C-could it be that–

"Please take good care of me, Kyousuke Onii-chan!"

–I've turned into a loli-con.

After hearing a familiar dialogue from an eroge from her, I started feeling very uncomfortable over my sexual taste.

***

That evening, we held a welcoming party for Ria.

It's been a long time since Mom put a lot of effort into her cooking, and thankfully, our small guest seemed to enjoy it.

Ria kept on complimenting her while eating a tofu dish with her fork, and seeing that made Mom very nostalgic–it reminded her of when Kirino was little.

It was also funny watching Dad get so nervous when he first met Ria, because he always feels very uncomfortable around foreigners. After Kirino's announcement, I'd already known that he started studying some basic English on his own time, and when Ria finally arrived and greeted

him in fluent Japanese, the astonished look on his face was quite an amusing sight. I had a difficult time trying not to laugh.

Oh, by the way, Ria told us that she learned Japanese from Kirino.

"Actually, Ria already seemed to know quite a bit of Japanese when I first moved in."

"But you still can't get better at speaking without talking to a native! After staying with Kirino, my Japanese improved a lot!"

"Really? That's good."

Aha, that's why she sometimes sounds much like a teenager. She must've learned it from Kirino.

"And Kirino can speak English really well too now!"

"Yeah. I guess we helped each other out a lot."

Heh, does that mean Kirino can speak English as well as how Ria speaks Japanese?

If so… that's impressive. I thought Kirino had returned from the US after only giving up everything, but she learned enough English to be able to hold a conversation. Although she's probably sad since she couldn't fulfill her original purpose, but isn't that still something worthwhile enough gained from studying abroad?

But I wouldn't say that out loud since she'd get mad at me.

And so, after the welcoming party ended–

I was taking a bath, recalling today's events.

"That Kirino, can't believe she actually became a good sister."

I couldn't help but smile while thinking about it. I knew how much she liked imoutos, but I never knew she'd act that way when actually in front of one.

She wasn't expecting Ria to be all 'moe'–she treated her like a real younger sister.

Introducing Ria to her friends, going on walks together, watching the TV together, and sometimes scolding her. Another person as old as Kirino

would be annoyed with how much she does for Ria. She cared about her a lot.

And Ria seemed to obey Kirino well.

But she kept on pulling mean tricks on her without a second thought.

Lifting her skirt was just the beginning–she kept on trying to show me Kirino's bras and panties, and Kirino unforgivingly swung her fists at her every time.

It's probably under Ria's influence that Kirino started attacking Kuroneko physically after her return. There's no other possible reason.

"Well, anyways."

Being the "moe imouto" addict Kirino is, surprisingly her and Ria shared a normal relationship.

Kirino always says something along the lines of–'Don't confuse 2-D with 3-D."

And I actually agree with that.

"If we really had another little sister, it'd be like this."

I murmured as I leaned back into the bathtub.

It was probably all thanks to that bright, cheery 'imouto' that Kirino was able to survive for three months in the US–away from family and friends.

Although she 'did' suffer a lot because of her, to the point she was willing to throw away her entire collection in order to push herself beyond her limits.

Ria Hagry. To Kirino, she is–

A cute little sister who is also her roommate,

An unbeatable rival on the tracks,

And someone who clearly brings out the difference in their talents.

"That sounds kind of familiar."

I wonder how Kirino felt, to have a younger sibling who is clearly superior to her. Like a certain someone else.

Then I wonder how she is able to love Ria so much, when she has such fragile emotions.

"…What an amazing person she is."

She was able to do something I could never do myself.

What can I say, I was proud of her.

…But I still wonder how she got into imouto eroge.

That question suddenly popped into my head. I don't understand myself how the topic changed so abruptly.

Anyways, it seems that relaxing in a hot bath has eased both my muscles and my worries. Let's move on since I wasn't thinking about anything too important in the first place.

I brought down the towel that I had placed on my head and wiped my face.

But speaking of imouto eroge, a beautiful girl coming to visit from overseas seems like a pretty common 'situation'. If my current life was like that game, there would definitely be a 'bathing together with Onii-chan' event, with HCG. (Note: I don't know, hentai something?)

Yep, the change room door will suddenly swing open, and Kirino and Ria, both dressed in erotic swimsuits will–

Tap, tap, tap, tap, BANG!

"Onii-chan, let's take a bath together!"

"EYAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

I screamed while frantically covering my chest, like a woman who had just encountered a molester.

Then I plunged myself deep into the water.

"Huh? Why are you hiding?"

I emerged with my back facing Ria and cried,

"What do you mean why I'm hiding?! How could you even ask me to take a bath with you? Y-you're completely naked again?! How did my wildest fantasies become a reality?! Go wrap a towel around yourself at least! No, a swimsuit! What happened to your swimsuit?!"

Oh crap, I was so surprised that I started to spew stuff from an eroge. I didn't mean to do that!

"Hm? A swimsuit?"

Ria spoke in a confused voice.

"I mean… just… find something to cover yourself up while I'm looking away! You're even more dangerous than an eroge, did you know that?!"

"Eroge?"

Ah, dammit. But do you even have a single clue of where I'm getting at???

"Anyways, just get out of here! Why do you want me to see you naked so much?!"

"That's because I really like Kyousuke Onii-chan!"

"Please come back after at least three years!"

And of course, Kirino decided to run in at such a perfect time, and now she's even more suspicious of me being a loli-con.

After the bath, I was in my room– deep in thought.

"Why? I mean, seriously. What is wrong with that kid…"

I couldn't help but be utterly shocked by Ria's behaviour.

Wouldn't a normal person be… less exposed?

I mean, we had just met. How could the Appeal Level start at maximum? (Note: eroge reference)

It reminded me of how it was exactly the opposite when Kuroneko and Manami had first met.

Although, that's probably because Kirino told Kuroneko some harsh things about her…

Mm…am I really so irresistible? Is that why it was love at first sight?

I started having some arrogant thoughts, but that didn't explain how I was never popular in school. Maybe…my looks only work on a foreigner?

… … … That's probably not it.

Then what could it be? How could Ria like me so much?

I decided to consult someone about it–I had no hope of ever figuring this one out by myself.

I wasn't about to ask this person about my problems directly, but only to get some hints that might help me think.

I grabbed my cell phone, which was lying right above my head.

'Thanks for calling, this is Tamura's!'

"Do you even know what time it is, you bald head. And don't give me your store greeting crap when I'm calling your cell phone."

'Ohh, these sharp words! I was wondering who it was, and it's An-chan!"

The person I called is the younger brother of my childhood friend, Rock.

Of course, that isn't his real name. But the name of his soul. (Note: wtf)

'What's up An-chan? Haven't seen you in a while!'

"Idiot, I was at your place not too long ago."

'Uh, really? Haha, to me it feels like it's been more than a year.'

Man, what is he talking about. Alzheimer's maybe?

Well, whatever. Good to see him still bright and energetic as usual.

"I wanted to ask something, how are we even friends?"

'What a mean thing to say right after you call someone!'

"No, no. Something happened before that made us closer. I was talking about that."

'Oh, that? Mm… maybe it's when An-chan saved my life in elementary school?'

"Saved your life? I don't remember doing something as impressive as that."

'Haha, you forgot, An-chan! When I had to take a crap at school, An-chan did everything to help me out!'

"I was confused for a second there, but how dare you bring up my worst memory from elementary school!"

'What's there to hide? Anyways, from that day on, I decided to serve An-chan forever!'

"You don't have to pay anything back, so you can stop following me!"

Beep, I hung up and let out a heavy sigh.

"… … … … Ah, I just want to get that out of my head."

Yup, I remember it now.

There was a reason why Rock was so obedient.

But we've still known each other well for a long time.

Isn't it natural to assist someone desperately in need of help?

But this isn't the case with Ria. We almost had just met, but it seemed like…she's following me as much as Rock does. How could this be happening, I wonder.

I could never figure it out, no matter how hard I thought about it.

***

The next day, I was at Akihabara with Kirino–this time with the addition of Ria.

The sky was clear without a single speck of cloud. The intense summer sunlight gently grazed my exposed skin, leaving almost a stinging sensation.

It was already July.

When I first came to visit a year and a month ago, the weather was exactly the same.

I gradually grew familiar with the sights in front of the station that I had once felt so unusual with.

Various stores moved in and out of buildings, characters in advertisements changed regularly, and the renovation for the station was finally complete.

Along with change of seasons, new trends and scenery always came along.

That is the city called Akihabara.

I felt a bit sad whenever I noticed a 'change' from what I last saw, and maybe that's because I was starting to feel much attached to this city which had helped build some fond memories.

Anyway, the reason we all came here is because Kirino wanted to show Ria, a guest from the opposite end of the planet, some major tourist attractions in the country.

Dad refused to let only a middle and elementary schooler travel around by themselves, so I, who could already purchase 18+ products, was forced to watch over them.

"…Sigh."

I don't really want to do this to be honest.

Why do I have to go sightseeing with an annoying older sister and a confusing younger sister who keeps latching onto me.

But I guess it's still better than having just the two of them walking around.

"Kirino, how come Akihabara is the first place you thought of when we're supposed to be visiting the best tourist attractions in the country? There's lots of other places. What about the Tokyo Tower that Ria wanted to visit so much, or the zoo, or Shibuya, that you like so much."

"Huh? It should be obvious Akihabara is the best place to visit in the country! Everything else comes later!"

"Ah, about that…"

I was about to argue back with a 'isn't that just your biased opinion?', but,

"Hehhhh, this is the infamous Akiba? I've always wanted to pay a visit at least once."

Ria was very happy. While holding a hand over her face like a sunscreen, she looked around and around like a person from the countryside would do when visiting a city for the first time.

One moment she was standing here. The next moment she was over there. Her legs wouldn't stop moving.

Ria had a hard time staying still. When we were on the subway earlier, she kept on complaining about how she would rather run than sitting around.

Of course, it would be impossible for her to arrive before the train does, but it showed how confident she was about her legs.

"That was quite the unexpected…"

"See, just like I told you. Akiba is really popular among foreigners."

"O-okay…"

Sure, there were a lot of foreigners in the city, but I'd thought it was only famous among Bridget and her relatives or some exclusive people like that. I shouldn't take her word for it though, since it's Kirino we're talking about here.

"Alright, I get that a lot of foreigners like Akiba, but what are you planning to do bringing Ria to such a suspicious place like this? Are you gonna go buy ero-games together or something?"

"Mm… are you thinking they only sell ero-games here?"

"Even if I did, it's your fault."

Hmph, I already know that there are lots of other things to buy. Love stones, SM merchandises, ero-DVD, and more.

Even I know that much.

"I'm not sure what you've got in your head there, but I'm not talking about any of that stuff. I meant something generic like figurines and comics."

She spoke as if she could read my mind. Can you stop giving me such a scornful look…

I was surprised too.

I still continued to bring up 'unclean' items while I was trying to think of something other than ero-games.

When did my mind become so corrupted…

I blame all of this on Akagi and his sister.

Just then–

While Kirino and I were engaged in a deep conversation, Ria, who was speeding past the Radio Center, called out to us excitedly. (Note: or Akiba Radio Kaikan, Radio Hall, etc.)

"Kirino! Kyousuke onii-chan! Look at this! There's a person dressed up in funny clothes!"

Ria was standing by a maid who was handing out flyers.

"Hey Ria, stop that!"

Kirino quickly ran over and pulled Ria away by her ponytail.

"Ow ow ow ow ow! Kirino! The hair! You said that was cheating!"

"You'll just run away if I don't do this! At least reflect on what you did wrong, you little brat!"

Kirino held onto the ponytails like a horse's reins.

Then,

"Um, sorry to have bothered you while you were working–"

Kirino started apologizing in place of Ria.

"This…rude idiot–!"

"Eh?!"

"N-nothing. Since it's all over…never mind."

The maid seemed to have been frightened by Kirino's murderous tone of voice.

The two were always like this. Kirino wasn't like an older sister who takes good care of her sibling–rather, a young mother dragging around a thickheaded child.

I spoke up as they returned.

"So Kirino, from where are we starting today?"

"Mm, I wanted to watch some anime on blu-ray. I already promised Ria, so."

"Then how about Animate first, then Toranoana?" (Note: Both are large retailers of anime, games, and manga in Japan)

"Sure."

Having been to this city countless number of times with my sister, numerous traveling routes naturally formed.

Being familiar with most of the places in the city, I no longer have a hard time deciding where to go. Feels sort of similar to when I hang out with Manami.

I was slowly becoming an otaku under Kirino's influence… too late to back out of all this now.

Ria smiled happily while watching us talk.

"You guys sure get along well!"

"S-shut up!"

"Ow?! Y-you pulled on my pony tail again?! This is what you call harassment, right?!"

"T-that's because you started sputtering disgusting stuff…"

I guess she still doesn't want to be openly nice to me. Manami said we would surely start getting along better, but I don't see that happening anytime soon…

This…no, nevermind. I already know.

Compared to the past, the gap between us had undoubtedly gotten smaller.

Close enough to go out and take the subway together, and ask each other where we want to go.

"Well, let's go to the Radio Center first!"

Kirino spoke irritably while pointing at the building right in front of us.

"Hey, weren't we planning to start from Animate?"

"I changed my mind! Come on, let's go already!"

"Ha…, fine, fine."

I bitterly trailed behind the 'princess'. A tearful Ria, who was rubbing her ponytail, approached me and whispered, "Kyousuke onii-chan…, Kirino is really stubborn sometimes, isn't she?"

"… You must've had a hard time because of that too."

Whoaaaaa… I can't believe there's someone in this world who actually understands what I've been going through!

I suddenly felt a burst of affection towards Ria, who I always had thought was some perverted kid that I had a hard time understanding.

Ahh, imoutos are wonderful.

For those who are unfamiliar with the city, the Radio Center is a shopping district located near the Akiba station.

The yellow sign, 'The world's Radio Center' is particularly noticeable.

A lot of people would picture this place as the 'Holy Land of electronics'. But to me it's just a suspicious building filled with stores that sell wireless devices.

This is not just for the Radio Center, but for all of the buildings in Akiba–the interior is very complex, and some buildings are fused with an adjacent building, so certain sections are laid out like mazes.

The store entrances are big and fancy, and have numerous escalators, while the exit only consists of a rusty staircase–a very common sight in Akiba.

And so I've gotten lost countless number of times. That's why–

"Hey wait, I don't see Ria anywhere!"

"Really, that kid… walking around by herself–did she get left behind?!"

–I expected something like this to happen.

We were near the yellow submarine located inside the Radio Center. It was a place decorated with tons of models and figurines.

"Ugh, seriously. When the heck did she disappear?"

"Well, it could've happened while you were running towards the imouto figurines just now?"

"… … But there was a brand new Meruru figurine…"

Kirino awkwardly took a glance at the figurine inside a glass casing.

I was utterly stunned.

"… Anyways we should be looking for her now."

"Yeah. She might be feeling nervous being separated from us."

"You think she'd do that? Wouldn't she just calmly run back home?"

"… You're really stupid, aren't you."

I was a little startled because her scornful voice sounded a little off than when she usually insults me.

Without bothering to explain anything further, Kirino continued in a fearful voice.

"We need to find her, quick."

"… Alright. Kirino, do you know if she owns a cell phone or not?"

"She doesn't."

Well, damn. She lives further from the modern world than even Manami.

"Then should we split up and look? We can call each other if one of us finds her."

"Okay. Even if you can't find her, give me a call every five minutes or so."

"Alright. Then see ya later."

"Yep. Don't mess around, and look carefully!"

"Yeah, I know."

After waving her goodbye with one hand, I separated with Kirino. Then, I searched once around the entire building, but couldn't find Ria.

… Could she have gone outside?

I went back to the Akihabara station, but couldn't catch a single sight of her there.

… Where could she have gone…?

As I stared back at the Radio Center building–

"!!!"

I found her. She was over there. On the roof, she's waving at me!

"Kyousuke onii-chan–! Up here–!"

"That little brat…! She doesn't even realize what we're going through…!"

I immediately dashed into the building. Using the stairs instead of the escalators, I quickly made my way up to the roof.

"Ha..., Ha…"

It was tiring. By the time I arrived at the top, I was completely out of breath.

However,

"She's not here! Where did she run off to?!"

I searched the entire roof, even the highest places.

Then suddenly–

"Yahoo–!"

I heard Ria's voice again.

I immediately turned to where the sound had come from–it was from right beneath me, in front of the building.

"You're kidding me right…? Is she like, teleporting all over the place??"

Surprisingly, there she was, waving up at me with an enormous smile on her face. She must've taken a different route down. But she didn't cross with me while I was taking the shortest route possible, and she didn't even seem fatigued at all. How much stamina does she have…

"Kyousuke onii-chan is suuuper slow–!"

"You, don't you dare move an inch from there!"

"Ahaha, no, no, I don't wanna! Why don't you come find me–?"

After sticking her tongue out at me, Ria disappeared back into the building.

Arghhh–, that bastard… Is she planning on playing hide and seek…

It's a pathetic thing to say, but I don't think I'll ever be able to catch her. She's just like Hagure Metal. (Note: a silvery slime monster that appears in a series called 'Dragon Quest')

I've got no choice but to call for reinforcements.

I called Kirino and explained the situation.

'… Alright. Let me know if you find her. You'll never be able to catch up to her, so.'

"… Y-yeah."

It really was the truth, but having it shoved in my face made me feel kind of depressed.

… … … … … … … … Hmm?

"Yo, Kirino."

'What? Got something else to say?'

"Doesn't all of this remind you of something from our past?"

'… … … … Not really."

Beep. After giving a dull reply, she hung up.

I have no idea myself why I said it in the first place.

"… … … … Well, whatever."

I shook my head and pressed onwards. I had to quickly find Ria and report back to Kirino.

This was very similar to the 'cops and robbers' game that we used to frequently play during our childhood.

Except the difference is that this 'robber' can run beyond the speed of any elementary schooler around the world and more. Quite a troublesome opponent.

Including the two phone calls, Kirino and I had been looking around for about ten minutes. I still hadn't caught my breath since I couldn't find the time to rest properly.

"Ha… ha… ha…, t-there she is…"

I finally found Ria in a bookstore that was inside the Radio Center building. It must have a wide variety of things to see, because Kirino and Saori visit here frequently whenever they come to Akiba.

All the customers were otakus, and because of that, an elementary schooler with brown skin stood out a lot among them.

She was observing the book shelves while keeping hidden from the shopkeeper. The customers around seemed highly bothered by her presence.

… Is this really the time to casually pick out comicbooks? She doesn't even know how Kirino and I feel– what a carefree fellow.

Well, at least now there's no need to call Kirino.

I'll sneak up behind and catch her!

But my plan was shattered, as I was five meters away from her–

"Whoa! Onii-chan! You finally came!"

Ria turned around as if she had eyes on the back of her head and started talking to me.

It didn't seem like she was about to run away though. Probably got tired of the 'hide-and-seek' already.

"… Do you want any of the books here? You look very interested… I can buy you a couple if you'd like."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

Good, now she should calm down a little.

Ria beamed while holding out a book in front of me. It was an A5-sized comic book with a very tan girl on the cover.

"I was looking at this one 'cause the girl looks a lot like me!"

"Oh yeah, she really doe-"

… Wait, hang on a second.

This is… ?

And this bookstore is… …

Ah!

"No, Ria! Not that book! Don't open it!"

I slowly realized where I was, but it was too late. Ria ripped open the cover and–

"Sniff…, I thought there'd be cute pictures inside… Onii-chan…, this book is kind of gross…, wahhh…"

"Well of course! It's not for little kids like you!"

AHHHHHH! T-that must've been why the others seemed bothered so much!

H-how could this happen?!

No, just listen to me, everyone–!!

Right now–

I was–

With a crying little girl–

IN AN ERO-COMIC BOOK STORE!!!

This was the worst possible scenario I could ever imagine. This isn't even on the level of sexual harassment–it's almost a crime!! If I don't hurry out of here, someone really might set the cops on me!

"Sniff… Wahhh–"

W-what do I do?! If she starts crying loudly, the cops really might come!

"Oh please don't cry, I beg you!!!"

"B-but…"

Ria seemed like she was about to burst any moment. I need to… I really need to do something right now…!

Dammit, this nervousness is taking away my breath!

Ha…, ha… Think, think! What am I supposed to do in this situation…?

I gently placed a hand on Ria's head, then I started patting her.

"Mm…"

Ria happily closed her eyes.

"…Sniff… Thanks, onii-chan…"

Whew… Seems like it worked.

I thought I'd be able to make her stop by doing this, since she likes me a lot.

It's something I had learned in the past.

I couldn't do it well, but I had my ways of handling little girls.

I mean, just look at this. I did it.

"Ha…, ha… O-okay, I'll buy you some candy so come with me, okay?"

"W-what the hell do you think you're doing?!"

Pow!

"Argh?!"

I received a strong kick from behind. I couldn't keep my balance and toppled over.

I felt sorry for myself for being able to recognize this, but–

This kick is from Kirino!

I turned around and saw her vicious, but astonished look.

"Y-y-y-y-you…, you… really had that kind of taste…?"

"N-no, you've got it wrong…! I was only trying to console Ria…"

"Y-you started panting excitedly after showing an ero-comic book to a little girl, and you think that kind of excuse will work now?!"

"Don't do it, Kirino! Kyousuke onii-chan did nothing wrong!"

As I was about to stand up, Ria hugged me and pulled me back down.

"I love onii-chan!"

I don't appreciate that feeling at all, and the timing is terrible too!

Of course Kirino wasn't convinced and still pushed everything back onto me.

"You loli-con! You're disgusting! Go die!"

"I-I'm not a loli-con–!"

There's nothing left to do but cry. Even if some kid likes me, I really don't feel any happier.

Oh please, I just wish someone would understand me!!!

***

Kirino finally eased up after Ria explained the entire situation herself.

Well actually…, it didn't seem like she accepted it fully.

"…Um."

I mean look at this, her stare is much colder than usual.

"A-anyways, let's move onto the next destination. We're gonna watch a blu-ray at Animate, right? Yeah?"

"… Okay, fine. But we will talk about this later, so you'd better prepare yourself."

"Prepare myself… what are you planning to do to me?"

Because that's frightening.

"Responsibility! You'll take responsibility, right onii-chan?"

"Can you just shut your mouth for a second? I'm not really in the mood to take that as a joke! Where did you learn to talk like that anyway?!"

"The girl in the comic book said it!"

Don't imitate something like that!

While being psychologically assaulted by both of them, we made our way over to Animate.

"Isn't this PV really awesome? They made tons of efforts towards the art and music!" (Note: PV = Promotional Video)

"Oh~, is this what Kirino was always talking about?"

Ria asked while watching the PV.

"Yeah! This is what I promised back in the US. While you're here in Japan, I want to show you everything about Meruru! You'll definitely like it!"

"Heh~, it's my first time watching something like this. It's amazing. Yep, I think it'll be fun!"

"Let's watch it right when we get home!"

"Okay~"

Haha, I can't tell who's the younger one.

And soon, the PV ended.

"Wow… not bad, not bad! … Being able to watch this show makes me so glad that I came back."

Kirino was in a trance while staring at the large screen in front of Animate.

"Do they not broadcast any anime in the US or something?"

"Well, I could find ways to watch them if I really wanted to. I could get you to send me recordings, for example. But I wasn't really in the mood, so."

"There weren't any televisions at the dorms there anyway!"

Ria added.

I guess there weren't many ways to entertain themselves because of the facility being made solely for serious training.

It was understandable that Kirino slowly degraded from stress. It was definitely a harsh environment for otakus.

I mean, even a normal person like me would find some difficulty in not being able to watch television at all (although being unable to use the Internet would be very stressful too).

"Ahaha, there really wasn't anything much to do, but train."

Compared to Kirino, whose face was full of discontentment, Ria didn't seem to crave too much fun and games.

"You guys didn't even have a television there? Wasn't it really boring every day, then? You too, Ria."

"Hm? It wasn't like that at all for me! It was really fun 'cause I was able to do what I wanted to every day!"

Ria put her arms behind her head and put on an innocent smile.

I sensed it–that she was being truly sincere.

If she could run, it didn't matter if there were no televisions or any other ways to entertain herself.

She doesn't need anything else–that's what she meant.

…Ah, I guess she truly is unbeatable.

That's how I felt. A shiver ran down my spine.

Kirino lifted her shoulders like she'd always do around Kuroneko, and made a cynical remark.

"It won't matter what you tell Ria. She's like a reincarnation of a mini four-wheeler, so."

"I'd prefer it if you could at least compare me to a horse. You're saying I'm not even a living creature?"

"It's true though. You just run and run till you run out of gas, but everything else is just 'alright' for you."

Among those words, there seemed to be a bit of longing mixed in.

I thought Ria would get mad at her, but she confidently replied back.

"Yep, I think all the other stuff is just alright."

"I figured you'd say that."

Kirino gave a weak smile as she seemed to have foreseen the future.

Why Kirino could never win against Ria,

This conversation summed up the reason.

Kirino had always trained very hard through perseverance and determination.

Model work, studies, hobbies, and the spent time with friends–she treated and valued all of them equally.

She should be proud of the way she deals with everything. It truly is impressive.

But it meant devoting a lot of her limited strength, time, and abilities on taking revenge on others.

A person who gives her all to just one thing only…

It's impossible to win against an opponent whose life only consists of running.

But to have a chance at victory, it was required to give up on all the things you've cherished.

To even out the circumstances.

"… …"

I understood at least a bit why Kirino decided to send me such a mail.

How stubborn. Everyone has something they're exceptionally good at, and something they're not.

It can't be helped simply by exerting yourself.

Ria probably doesn't even have to motivate herself to always train hard.

While seemingly throwing away all the fun things in life and practicing every day like there's no tomorrow,

She can smile and enjoy it since it had become such a natural daily routine.

How do I know all this?

Because this is the same for you, Kirino.

All the modeling, studying, participating in doujinshi circles, and gaming–

Being able to go through such a tight schedule while enjoying it—is the exact same aspect between you and Ria.

How you feel about Ria is probably similar to how I feel about you.

Being stubborn.

Well, you're still more impressive than me though.

Even then, I can always help you out when you need it.

While I was observing my sister with all of these contained feelings, Kirino decided to explain some things to Ria.

"Ria, you told me that you don't care about anything else other than running,"

"Hm?"

"That's the reason I really wanted to bring you here. I wanted to show you the things I like. It's hard to explain… but rather than for you, it was what I wanted to do myself."

"I understand."

Ria beamed. Then she started to carefully observe her surroundings.

This was Akihabara, the place Kirino cherished the most.

Meruru PVs (Promotional Videos) flowed from Animate's TV screens.

The street was filled with cosplayers, there were music concerts at various specially made stages, and a nearby store had a small crowd in front of a screen which displayed a game demo.

There were manga, anime, games, music, figurines, plastic models, arcades, and maid cafes…

All of Japan's subcultures seemed to exist in this neighbourhood.

The place that helped us siblings build fond memories.

The place where we made new friends.

Presented before Ria was the place Kirino desperately wanted to return to.

And also–

For some reason, Ria stared at me directly.

"I understand very well now, Kirino."

Ria nodded and turned back to face Kirino.

"I'm enjoying myself, believe me. Hehe, Kirino has too many things to worry about."

"Mm… it's nothing like that.

"For sure I don't need anything else if I can continue running, but it's nothing bad to have other things. Friends, playtime and such."

"Hmph, that's good then."

Kirino muttered as she turned away, but sounded relieved.

'I might have been bothering a friend who knows nothing other than athletics by forcing my own hobbies onto her.'

Ria seemed to understand how Kirino had felt all this time, when she told her that Kirino had too many worries.

Also,

'It's nothing bad to have other things.'

This means that the 'other things' wouldn't really matter to her even if she didn't have any.

While enjoying everything in front of her to the fullest, comparing to running, friends and spending time with them wouldn't be too high of a priority in Ria's view.

At least that's how it sounded to me. The world's fastest pair of legs–that might be the result of this unique mindset of hers.

…And to be honest, her innocent smile appeared a bit frightening at that moment.

Damn Kirino, going around and impressively overcoming someone like this.

But this situation produced more confusion.

For someone whose life only consists of running, why would she spend the time to leave the training grounds in LA and come all the way to Japan?

To become closer friends with Kirino, or to learn about the Japanese culture–

Those reasons should be at the bottom of Ria's priority list.

"… …"

I wasn't confident, but I did have something on my mind.

The true motive behind why Ria came to Japan is–

"So… let's get down to the match, shall we?"

Ria spoke up excitedly while returning home after we were done with our sightseeing.

It was precisely when we were passing by Kirino's school.

It was the evening. Even when the daytime was longer, it was beginning to get dark.

"A match?"

Kirino was confused.

"Yeah, a match. A race."

Ria halted to point at the schoolyard.

"Here, this place looks pretty nice. It should feel just like running on a real track."

"Hmph, aren't you stupid. How can I possibly run with this casual outfit?"

Kirino looked a bit startled. Ria decided to take advantage of it.

"Aha, you're doing it again Kirino. Pretending not to notice."

"Hm…? What is it?"

"Your shoes. Also the pants, and the shirt."

Starting from the feet, Ria pointed out how Kirino was dressed.

"You shouldn't be saying something like 'How can I possibly run with this casual outfit' when you're wearing something so comfortable to move around in. And those shoes. They don't have any spikes, but they're the ones you used to wear during practices. For a showy person like Kirino, it doesn't really make sense for you to wear them all the time."

"…"

Kirino was silent throughout.

As if a detective saw through her ruse.

There was no way for me to enter the world that had suddenly formed between them. All I could do was stand still like a scarecrow and watch them from afar.

With a 'hmm', Ria lifted a corner of her mouth.

"Weren't you thinking about doing this from the beginning?"

"I did think… that you might propose something like it.

Kirino sighed in defeat.

"That's why I dressed in such a way that is unthinkable for me to do so, but I guess it kind of backfired."

Man, I didn't realize this at all.

"So Ria, the reason you came to Japan is to–"

"Of course! To get my revenge on Kirino!"

Ria beamed brighter than ever. Kirino spoke like she could not believe what she had just heard.

"Of course, I should've known. Che, I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up that you might've come here because you wanted to see your onee-chan. What a heartless kid." (Note: Onee-chan is literally the word for 'older sibling' in Japanese, same as in Korean, but it means something else. The term is used when a younger female refers to an older female in Korean anyway, but I wasn't too sure which word is used for this case in Japanese, and I don't own a Japanese copy, so I'll leave it as it is.)

"Oh, of course I wanted to see you. In different ways."

As an onee-chan who adored her,

And as a rival who defeated her.

"Ria, that was only because I happened to be in a good condition… no, you wouldn't believe it, would you."

"Meh, I'm not stupid. There's no way I'd lose just because of that."

Ria seemed to sulk a little, but there was great confidence in her voice.

She was saying that even if she ran a hundred races with Kirino, she would win all of them!

From the short conversation, tension began to rise between Ria and Kirino. I could almost see the flames burning in their eyes. Ria had a smile on, yet her eyes were no longer smiling.

"That time, Kirino was faster than me, when you could even barely catch up to me on the day before. So I wanted to know. What had happened on that day. What kind of magic you used to speed yourself up. Why you returned home when you had beaten me."

"Ria–"

"I guess the answer is all the things you've shown me today?"

"Yep."

Kirino replied softly.

"This is me. I finally understand. When I was out there… that wasn't me. That's why I returned here. To be the real me."

Although it wasn't directed at me, it was something to be extremely happy about.

… So that's why. That's what you were thinking.

"Even if you call me a quitter, I can't help it I guess. Because… I can't leave behind all the other things I love. Doujinshi, friends, family, hobbies–I need all of that to be my true self."

That's what she had decided after her return.

After countless hours of thinking and worrying, this was the answer. Nobody else needed to know.

My sister put on her usual arrogant face, confidently bared her chest and announced that–

"I will beat you right now as my real self."

"Then I will beat your current self and return to LA."

Ria slowly bent down and reached for her ankles.

"Hehe, the coach never told me to take these off unless I'm taking a bath, but–!"

Thump… thump… she began to take off something that seemed to have considerable weight.

"–Hold onto these, onii-chan!"

"Uh, whoa!"

She had been wearing ankle weights. They were quite heavy.

"… She's like a character from an action anime…"

Instead of being impressed, I couldn't really believe it.

Both her coach and herself were insane.

This wasn't on the level of simple training; it was more like a path of suffering to reach enlightenment.

"Now I'm ready. Be sure to give it your best, Kirino!"

Both of them decided to hold a duel at Kirino's school's field.

At the silent field, we three were the only one there.

I was tasked with being the referee, which I stood at the end of the field and watched them from their crouching start position.

Both Kirino and Ria took the same stance, awaiting for my signal.

Ergonomic speaking, this is the starting position that allowed fastest possible start.

It was based on numerous trails and failures and finally became the crystallization of study and wisdom.

It was the same as a cannonball before firing.

"I should give them the signal ----"

Even from a hundred meters away, I could still feel the tension.

Next --- I gave the order by vigorously my arm down.

Bang! A loud sound rang when both of them kicked off. They immediately started running. I was probably mistaken, because there would no way the sound would be that loud – but my ears did feel the tremor from the ground. Ria's acceleration had this overwhelming power.

Even compared her to a rocket jet is not enough.

Everyone who once had to run with all of their might would understand how abnormal she was.

This…this girl…from the start her footing was very fast! First step, second step, third step, fourth step --- she easily reached her maximum speed.

But Kirino wasn't even close, she was still accelerating.

Before they passed the one-tenth of one hundred meters, there was already a big gap between them.

Ria didn't seem to do that on purpose --- but this was what 'absolutely gap' mean.

Seeing this, any opponent would only feel despair.

But Kirino's eyes still shines with fighting spirit.

Since she already knew about her opponent's power, even when there was a gap, she still calmly continued her acceleration. Just following her practice's route line – that was what Kirino's eyes saying.

My eyes was drawn toward the two running figures on the field.

Of course, I didn't know what were their posture called. But they both held their body straight, waving their hands, with long and firmly steps. Strangely enough, how would that exaggerated action looked so beautiful? Ria was having a happy expression coming from the bottom of her heart while running.

And Kirino showed a burning eyes, fiercely staring at her opponent's back.

Although their posture were the same, but their expression were totally different. At the beginning, there was already a gap between them. When they passed the 50 meters mark, the gap was bigger now.

Under this condition, it was impossible for Kirino to turn the table --- even an outsider like me could tell this much. Ria's revenge toward Kirino had successes.

"Come on…."

I let my voice out.

"Come on Kirino…..!"

From the finishing line, I shouted my encouragement.

From the bottom my heart, my voice carried my burning emotion outside.

"Come on --------!"

There is no way I could stay aside anymore.

Kirino was forced into a corner just like me in the past – by my superior little sister.

But even in this situation, unlike me who ran away, she was facing her challenge.

How could I not encourage her?

"Kirino…don't lose---!"

Just like I was running on the field myself.

My little sister, who was always causing me pains and troubles.

My little sister, who directly facing her challenge, who never gave up on her desperately struggle – she was fighting. Come on! You can still make it! I felt my eyes meet Kirino's for a second/

Maybe the distance between her and Ria was shortened.

No --- it did shorten.

Kirino's maximum speed --- was higher than Ria!

"This is your chance! Pass her…pass her! Kirino!"

There was 30 meters left. I shouted out at the top of my lung.

Life is like a R18+ game.

As long as you clicked on a choice, you couldn't turn back.

Even failure wouldn't be remade, there would no such miracle.

Things that can't be done just can't be done. Impossible situation just won't get a solution.

But in the end, who dare to make sure! How could you know what can't be done without trying! People aren't god, how could they know what would happen in the future! So don't hold back, pass her! Defeat her, Kirino! Shoved aside all common sense ----

"Come on……..!"

There was only a short distance left until the finishing line.

Kirino was running at her maximum speed, she was nearly right behind Ria.

Seeing that I only cheered for Kirino, maybe Ria felt a bit dishearten.



Still, sorry, Ria, although you are a super cute girl who liked me.

But this kind of action had became my habit. Yes, any onii-chan with a little sister would have this kind of habit. So cheering for his little sister is normal. Yeah, I should say it now ----

"I'm not a lolicon! I'm a siscon ---------! Wiiiiiiiiiiiinnnnnnnnnnnn! Kirinooooooooooooooo!"

I didn't know what was that meant. I didn't even know what did I just say.

But in the end, I conveyed my encouragement and my feeling toward my little sister.

Just like she responded to my words, Kirino's speed increased.

In the end --- Kirino still lost.

After the fearsome challenge ended…

"….Hoh…hoh…hoh…"

After spent all of her strength on the run, Kirino bent over by my side, her head down, her shoulder trembled.

"Hoh~!"

On the other hands, despite that Ria was breathing hard, but she didn't look half dead.

"….."

From the current atmosphere, now wasn't the time for me to interrupt.

Although you lost, but the run was evenly matched --- even if you kill me, I wouldn't say that.

" ---- Ah ~ I lost -----"

Kirino looked up to sky and said in a strong tone. Her body was covered in sweat. At this time, Ria came closer and raised a V-shape gesture.

"Kirino! Ehehehe --- Ria won!"

"…Ah --- I know already…why are you boasting now…I'm depressing…could you think about a loser's feeling a little?

"Of course not! A win is a win! Ahaha --- revenge completed! Ehehe --- Know how amazing I am!"

Like a rabbit, Ria jumped up and down in happy.

She was such a merciless winner. But at least it didn't feel too bad.

Still, Kirino must be very pissed off now.

"This…damn brat…You…. Infuriating me….I'm so pissed off! Ah --- you looked down on me too much!"

Kirino stomped on her spot. Then her eyes quickly got all teary, she angrily said:

"Ria…although I like you, but now you are the most hated girl in the world."

"Eh ---? Really ---? Ehehehe, Ria like Kirino too, but to tell the truth, Ria came to Japan only to see that look on your face now!"

She then pointed her finger at Kirino, while Kirino "Kuh---" then turned crazy.

"I totally don't understand you! Real imouto is no good! 2D imouto is much better!"

You had no right to say that.

I lectured her inside my heart.

The next day -----

After Ria finished her 'revenge' and watched 'Kirino's crying face', she immediately said 'Uhm, I have to come back."

After Ria quickly finished her preparation to come back, I spoke with her in surprise:

"You really came to Japan because of that reason…."

"Eh ---? Ahahaha --- really --- are you an idiot---?"

Hey, what is the meaning of this? I don't want to be called idiot by an idiot.

Ria was checking her belonging on the living room, she sat down next to me on the sofa. Then she came closer.

"Did you carefully hear what Ria said? Of course payback to Kirino is my most important goal! But this is not the only one…."

"Aa…you did say that you wanted to go sightseeing too. But…."

Wasn't the priority order different? So since you get your revenge, you didn't have any reason to remain in Japan?

"No. It's not it."

I didn't know where did it come from, but Ria held her stomach and laughed.

Maybe I was mistaken, but in an instant --- she showed a hint of frivolous with a mature expression

"Ria always wanted to know why did she lose to Kirino that day. I came to find out what help Kirino to run this fast. That was Ria's real intention. Back at America, when I talked with everyone, I had a good guess --- but I still wanted to confirm it with my own eyes."

"….."

"Then I understood. So I could go back now. Unless I kept training hard, Kirino will catch up with me. So I can't waste any time anymore."

I see.

I want to show Ria something I like.

I totally don't get it, Kirino.

That's why Ria understood? After a visit to Akihabara?

In other words…the only time Kirino won against Ria was then I arrived at Los Angeles?

Back then, she said "…I need to do something now." Then left.

After playing R18+ game, she recovered….and challenged Ria.

"In America, because Kirino didn't have what she liked, it ruined her body. That's why the Kirino you constantly defeated in America wasn't the true Kirino. Once she recovered her previous strength, of course you would be surprise."

"Eh? You seem to understand it perfectly!"

"Don't look down on me, brat. Who do you think I am?"

"Kirino's super favorite's onii-chan, right?"

"Wh..Why do you have that conclusion!"

"Kirino's self was all injured because she couldn't see onii-chan --- and wasn't Kirino suddenly became so fast because of onii-chan came to Los Angeles?"

That…this girl…had such serious mistake…!

Kirino was weakened was totally not because of she couldn't see me ---

It was all because you shared a room with her, so she couldn't play R18+ game.

Because she couldn't meet Kuroneko or Ayase!

Then Kirino suddenly came back all because I played eroge with her.

My evidence was what she said herself! She said "It has been a long time since I did what I want to…Now I feel better" and "After playing some eroge, I feel happy now!"

Thinking back, to recover with such reason was so unbelievable! There is no way I could tell an innocent child that 'she won against you because of an eroge's power!"

…No way…no other way…aside from continuing this misunderstanding.

"Ria, just like you said. Because Kirino saw her favorite onii-chan again, she recovered."

"Right right, the power of love!"

"Hmph --- yeah, something like that."

Aagh. So disgusting. Ugh….

"I see --- then if I like onii-chan too, will I become faster?"

"How could it be?"

As if I know! That was how the logic work in a situation when affection point was Max from the first meeting?

"Don't come closer, it's hot! What time do you think is it?"

"I'm in love with Kyousuke! Um --- !"

Crank. The living room's door was opened.

"You…you two did that again! How many time I have to tell you! You lolicon! Trash!"

Say Kirino, did you purposely wait behind that door? You always appeared at the worst possible time. Damn…I….I'm not a lolicon!

It was time to say goodbye to Ria.

I and Kirino watched this girl left.

"See you later, Ria. The next time is my turn to revenge, just prepare yourself!"

"You will never success. I will not lose to Kirino who practice with such impure reason. You will forever run behind me for the rest of your life."

"Hm, you dare to say that. True, unlike you, I didn't practice running because I like it. But I'm not the type to let a lose go without revenge!"

"Really ---? Didn't you already reach your original goal?"

"But now, track is already an important part of me. Like any of my treasures, I won't give up on it."

"When I listen to this reason, I only think that you are just a dabbler who easily get angry…But it's not the case, right? Kirino was able to run fast because of this, right?"

"That's right. Beside --- I have found my reason from you."

Kirino raised her chest, her expression firm without the slightest bewildered.

"Then I could on tell you to try harder. But I will never lose to Kirino. I will definitely not lose to you. While Kirino was immersing in other things, Ria was continuing training."

"I'm not afraid. Just wait for my revenge."

"Aha, Ok."

They knocked their fist together.

This wasn't something an outsider like me can interrupt. Those two rivals shared an empathy.

"…Then I'm going."

"Bye bye, Ria."

Ria showed a reluctant smile --- then turned her back to us.

When she placed her hand on the door, Kirino said "About…"

"Ria, I forgot to ask."

"What?"

Ria turned her head back.

"During the duel between us in Los Angeles, did you use your heavier shoe?"

" --- Of course not. I removed it, seriously battled against you."

"I see. It's good then."

Kirino turned her head away.

Ria ignored that and turned to me:

"Bye bye, Kyousuke-onii-chan! The next time Ria come, please marry me and come back with me to Los Angeles! It's decided! ---!"

"Since when it's decided! Hurry up and go home! You brat!"

"Ehehe! Treat me so badly, don't you worry about it in the future ---? The next time we meet, I might have become a beautiful girl!"

Leaving that words behind, Ria ran outside.

She probably ran toward the airport.

Ah, really, can't keep her down…

Came from aboard, caused an ruckus then left --- she was like a wind.

"She left…"

"Um."

I and Kirino looked at the road Ria just gone.

"It's a bit silence."

"Lolicon."

"I…I don't mean it!"

"Ah right. You are a siscon right?"

Kirino broke into laugher. Seemed like she overheard my conversation with Ria.

Kirino tried to suppress her laughter and said:

"Hey, there is something I want to ask you."

"Ah, 'Life counseling' again?"

I regretted letting out a happy sound.

But Kirino shook her head.

"No. Didn't I said the last time is 'it would be the last'?"

"Yeah. You are right…."

True, my little sister's life counseling had ended.

Kirino didn't ask me for 'life counseling' afterward.

Still…life counseling is not something with a beginning or an end.

What is the different between 'life counseling' and 'request'? To tell the truth, just the name changed right?

However, if it's what Kirino asked, then I don't have anything to say.

But it was so strange. At the beginning, when I received her life counseling request --- I was very reluctant and impatient. But now --- no no no, I still hated it now.

"So what is your 'request'? Today I'm in a good mood, let's hear it."

Character file.13
Ria Hagry



◆性別:女
◆年齢:12歳
◆身長:153cm
◆体重:44Kg
◆3サイズ:75/55/80

リア・ハグリィ【りあ・はぐりぃ】

◆世界一足が早い小学生。桐乃の留学先のルームメイトで、桐乃とは姉妹のような関係だった。走ることに喜びを感じるサラブレットのような少女で、その他のことにはまるで無頓着。"とある理由"のため日本を訪れる。

13

At least I should listen to her now.

I planned to continue living with my not-cute little sister.

"Um…Um…that….it's so hard to say it…."

" --- Please become my boyfriend."

References

1. ↑ Polite Japanese language, doesn't really have a direct English equivalent.
2. ↑ Akiba is short for Akihabara
3. ↑ Doujin refers to any sort of non-professional or fan-made works.
4. ↑ A major building in Akihabara with cafes, restaurants, and event space.
5. ↑ 1926-1989, though in this context it probably refers to the later years, so 80s.
6. ↑ A series of cream and coffee beverages made by Glico.
7. ↑ As in sadist, if you didn't know.
8. ↑ Pronounced 'dokyun', it's internet slang for a crazy/stupid person.
9. ↑ It's just a Japanese custom to say this
10. ↑ By dark matter, I think they're referring to the general perverted/weird stuff.
11. ↑ Scatology is the study of feces or poop. So this is an eroge for people with a fetish for feces (think 2 Girls 1 Cup).
12. ↑ Kuroneko talks in a tone that Kyousuke should be thankful that she called out to him.
13. ↑ or free day
14. ↑ PET stands for Polyethylene terephthalate. Which is a type of recyclable plastic.
15. ↑ A Monolith is some unidentified object from 'Space Odyssey'.
16. ↑ I like this word.
17. ↑ She uses an adjective that literally means "under 20 years old". I think the word has a sexual quality to it, but not sure.
18. ↑ Unlike English, Japanese has a distinctive set of grammar for polite conversations and impolite/informal.
19. ↑ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plastic_model
20. ↑ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Char_Aznable
21. ↑ Japanese people say this a lot to show surprise.
22. ↑ A gundam plastic model
23. ↑ I have no idea what that is

24. ↑ The word 'gundam' was partly censored in the Korean version and I just assumed it was copyright doing its job. It might be wrong, so it would be great if someone with a Japanese copy can confirm this.

25. ↑ They're certain Japanese time. periods

26. ↑ A bunch of games from the past, as you could've probably guessed.

27. ↑ Not much of a note, but I used to play a lot of King of Fighters and Metal Slug with the emulator. Shit is so cash. :p

28. ↑ SNK produced NeoGeo of course.

29. ↑ Pronounced "Kerberos", like in Greek or Latin.

30. ↑ Another vague translation, but not important.

31. ↑ Aru-chan = Alpha Omega from Meruru.

32. ↑ The way she said 'Yes' was kind of strange, can't find a way to show it in English though.

33. ↑ Visual novel/eroge reference.

34. ↑ I think she's personifying the stuff that the circle has left behind, just wanted to clarify.

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